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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

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Visit <www.ala.org/aasl/kq> to read this online exclusive.
“When teaching DDC, I tell my students to pick up the item and think, ‘If I were going to use this item in a class in school, which class would I be going to?’”

Is It Truly a Matter of “Dewey or Don’t We”? — pg 47
As president of AASL, I’m asked frequently about my professional stance on the movement known as “Ditching Dewey.” I answer, quite truthfully, that this seems to be one of the most fascinating groundswell movements in our field in decades. That answer, while not sufficient to those conference-goers waiting to hear the perfect response, nonetheless sums up my own indecision. That indecision comes from my various roles as a teacher of pre-service librarians, a mentor to those already in the field, and an elected leader of AASL. From my perspective, the issue comes down to:

- Who makes the rules in libraryland?
- How do those rules get changed?
- What is AASL’s role in that change?
- What’s best for library users?

Access for All

Our publicly perceived personae of stern, shushing, bun-headed librarians have always been at odds with our passionate attention to access and equity. Librarians have been known to march in the streets for intellectual freedom and wear their favorite freedom-to-read T-shirts.

Our intense desire to throw open the bounds of knowledge is not limited to wildly touted slogans used in the library field. We believe in the right of all patrons to read freely and widely, in all formats, for any reason, and to aid in achieving any goal. Libraries stand at the basis of a free society, and librarians are the guardians of that freedom. We are forthright in our stance, in part at least, because our standards and guidelines, policies and position papers, and stated principles support it. It’s easy to point to the exact line in Empowering Learners or state a paragraph from a position paper that clearly gives us our mission and guides us in a chosen course of action.

Traditions and Changes

The only time our hidden stereotype bursts forth is in the area of organization of the collection. Sometimes even those in the profession who have embraced the physical rearrangement of the school library that expresses itself in the learning commons concept are haunted by the ghosts of librarians past when they even think of straying from the strictures of Sears or Dewey.

But it is not true that the rules governing the organization of library collections have been unchanged for centuries. Sometimes rules get changed because librarians just stop following them, like the diminishing importance of the annual inventory. Sometimes the rules change due to technology, like the print card catalog.

Some rules and policies had no background in our standards and guidelines. No one is quite sure why
first-graders were allowed to check out only one book, second-graders two books, and so on. No standard states what percentage of the nonfiction collection should be in each Dewey category.

Other past practices now seem equally bizarre but did have a basis in reality. “Library hand” was a form of penmanship used by librarians to write catalog cards, predating the typewritten ones. Even the placement of books on the shelf was predetermined once upon a time. And from what organized mind came the ALA filing rules that prescribed that books by McDonald would precede books by Macgregor on the shelf?

In these days of databases, we find accession books quaint. Library back rooms had stacks of dusty tomes in which new books were recorded, along with the purchasing source and price. As strange as these rules seem now, they were developed for a reason valid at the time.

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Need for Structure

Organization is the foundational structural element for access. Without organization, no one would be able to find materials in libraries. One of the first things that we teach is that libraries are all organized in the same way. Other than minor anomalies, libraries basing the collection on Dewey are organized the same. The only other choice for libraries, it seems, would be to use the Library of Congress system, but even then, although the numbers are different, the basic organization is the same. Once a patron learns the system, all libraries configured under that system are easily used.

When interlibrary loan and union catalogs came on the library scene, the need for structure became even more important and more rigid. If we can merge all catalog records for a school district, a regional library system, or even a state, then everyone has to follow the same rules of cataloging. If the rules aren’t followed, instead of the union catalog showing one hundred copies of one resource, the catalog would give the impression that one hundred resources were available, each just slightly different from the others.

Even libraries currently not part of any shared system must have library protocols because we do not know what the future holds. School libraries that once had a standard of cataloging fiction books with only title and author cards found that, when parallel reading and theme units became popular, recataloging was necessary and time-consuming.

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Need for Service

It was easier to justify this type of universal protocol when information systems were unsophisticated and resources were all the same format. The system becomes harder to defend when virtual resources are displayed by genre, websites organized by curricular topic, and audiobooks by device. Curation of resources, rather than the more structured approach to organizing collections, has created a more open environment, and as millennials enter the profession, school librarians are looking at the rigid organizational structure of the traditional collection as an option, not a rule.

Some librarians rightly believe that to provide the best service, the library collection should be arranged to match the interests of users. Therefore, genre-fying the fiction collection and arranging the nonfiction collection by topic seem to be logical and refreshing choices. On the other hand, purists claim that some books don’t fit into one genre. Others point out that Dewey does arrange books by topic and that any system will be flawed, so why spend the time and energy to invent another, inevitably flawed system? The time that it takes to re–do cataloging and classification for a library collection could be devoted to serving users directly, regardless of when the conversion is done.

Naturally, library professionals turn to their professional library association for direction and guidance to prove that they are right and that the other side is wrong. But in this case, the issue is just not that simple.
AASL’s Role

Practitioners in the field turn for guidance to AASL, the oldest and largest professional association for school librarians. Certainly, AASL issues guidance documents. A search of AASL’s eCOLLAB and Essential Links provides a wealth of guidance on a variety of topics. The mission of the association is to advocate excellence, facilitate change, and develop leaders in the school library field. One of the elements of that mission, it can be argued, is to define best practices for the arrangement of 21st-century school libraries. If research reveals that these best practices are different from 20th-century practices, then the organization could promulgate guidelines and provide training to help school librarians implement new best practices. Alternatively, if research supports the continued effectiveness of traditional arrangements, AASL could make recommendations to that effect.

However, AASL’s role is to be a virtual space where school librarians can exchange ideas, envision the future, and get expert advice on school library topics. Our “Essential Functions” page on the AASL website constantly refers to AASL’s encouraging the exchange of ideas among members and providing opportunities for professional growth through formal and informal activities. This issue of Knowledge Quest is an example of this encouragement of the exchange of ideas.

AASL is leading the way on this issue and others, not by pronouncement or fiat, but rather by providing a space for school librarians to learn from each other and grow. School librarians are free to explore different ways of fulfilling their mission and, with AASL’s assistance, have the mandate as professionals to share their successes, ask for advice from others, and collaborate on ways to continue to learn and grow.

Gail K. Dickinson is president of AASL. She is associate dean for graduate studies and research in the Darden College of Education at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and has authored numerous articles on school library programs and practice. She is also the editor-in-chief of Library Media Connection magazine.
The seeds for the theme of this issue began in June 2012 during the Sunday AASL Affiliate Assembly meeting at ALA Annual Conference in Anaheim, California. The delegates from the affiliated state organizations were deliberating and voting on Statements of Concern. These concerns are taken seriously as those approved by the Affiliate Assembly are sent to the AASL Executive Board, which must take action and report back to the AASL Affiliate Assembly, detailing what was done.

No one expected the Statement of Concern first brought by the Kansas Association of School Librarians (KASL) to result in an issue of Knowledge Quest. In her article in this issue, Juanita Jameson (at the time, president of KASL and one of its delegates) gives more of the background on how the issue came to the floor of the Affiliate Assembly. What happened next—and how I became the guest editor for this issue—is a story in itself.

When the Statement of Concern reached the AASL Executive Committee the decision was made to add to the schedule for ALA Midwinter in Seattle a “Hot Topics” program on “genre-fying” a collection. Six panelists, all of whom have articles in this issue, presented on the subject, taking pro, con, and middle-of-the-road views. I was asked by AASL’s president at the time, Susan Ballard, to be the moderator. The room was packed with people in every seat, people standing—and some finding seats on the floor.

The discussion at the end brought forth from the audience additional strong views. A number of those voices are included here as well. With that much emotion, it was obvious that the topic needed greater and more widespread coverage and discussion. The result was the decision to devote an issue of Knowledge Quest to this theme. As the “impartial” voice, I was asked to be the guest editor.

A Personal Perspective

My personal experience with genre-fying began many years ago. At the time, I worked in a high school library with a sizable collection, including at least five thousand fiction titles. As a reader, I had little difficulty finding something of interest to borrow. I could always look for my favorite authors or seek out a recommended title. Sometimes I would choose a book that was on the best-seller list. Browsing was an enjoyable pastime. Because of my personal inclinations, I would scan the shelves for a thick book and then read the blurb to see if it was a likely choice. I

What I saw as a treasure trove, they found overwhelming. I realized I needed to do something different.
admit, unless I was searching for something specific, I would generally survey the three shelves within my eye range, rarely looking upward or downward.

I began wondering how my students who were less devoted to reading as a leisure activity would fare when trying to find something to read for a book report. I discovered that, other than trying to find a thin book, students didn’t know how to approach the collection, which they found daunting. Its size defeated its purpose of encouraging them to read. What I saw as a treasure trove, they found overwhelming. I realized I needed to do something different.

Although I had weeded the fiction collection, a challenging task in many ways, I saw that too many books looked dusty. Most of these were the classics you do not discard. So my first venture into genre-fying was to remove all classics and shelve them separately, putting a “C” above the spine label and adding the designation to the records so the books could be found. I suggested the classics collection as a source to check before going on a college interview. The move immediately made our fiction shelves look much better.

New books and graphic novels were already being shelved separately. I decided to go with my students’ favorite genres: fantasy and science fiction. At first I was going to make them two separate areas but, after discussing the issue with students, I kept it as a single designation. Instant hit. Mysteries were the next to be genre-fied. By tackling the task one genre at a time, I kept the job from being overwhelming and was able to assess the response before committing more time and effort. I even wrote an article about the process for the November 1997 issue of my newsletter, School Librarian’s Workshop.

Even though the small reclassification was successful, I never even considered doing the same with the nonfiction collection. Despite anomalies, the Dewey Decimal Classification system seemed to me to be logical and efficient. As this issue more than demonstrates, librarians have a wealth of opinions on all sides of the topic.

What Should You Do?

Is it a good idea to “genre-fy” your collection? Should you consider it only for fiction? Has the Dewey Decimal Classification system run its course, no longer relevant in the twenty-first century? Or is it still the best alternative? These are important questions for school librarians (and public librarians as well). You will have to come to a decision that will best meet the needs of your users.

This issue will help you determine your future course. Read what practitioners have done and why. Compare the opinions of those who take positions that are polar opposites. Consider some of the middle-of-the-road options. Talk with your colleagues—and your students. Then decide.

Hilda K. Weisburg is the editor of School Librarian’s Workshop, a bimonthly e-newsletter for K–12 librarians. Starting in November, she will teach a six-week e-course for ALA Editions titled “Being Indispensable: A School Librarian’s Guide to Proving Your Value and Keeping Your Job.” Her first YA fantasy, Woven through Time, was published in October by Vermillion Pencil Press, an imprint of Grey Gate Media. She is a member of AASL, a delegate to the AASL Affiliate Assembly from the New Jersey Association of School Librarians, a member of the ALA Committee on Literacy, and chair of the AASL Advocacy Committee.

Work Cited:

FEATURE

A GENRE

CONVERSATION

BEGINS
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fter many of our members voiced concerns about the validity of a process to rearrange a school library and the steps involved at the various school levels, the Kansas Association of School Librarians (KASL) asked AASL, via an Affiliate Assembly Statement of Concern, for direction on genre shelving. Our desire was to start a conversation in an effort to give credence to concerns of KASL members—and school librarians in other states. We also hoped to get answers to the multitude of questions we were fielding. Some Kansas school librarians had tried various methods of genre arrangement; some found that it worked, and others found that it did not. Questions were raised about how to determine what direction to go, what to consider when deciding whether to rearrange a school library, and what possible pitfalls might be encountered. With more questions than answers, we turned to AASL.

The concern stated: “Many school librarians are questioning the method of arranging their library collections. The move away from Dewey classification to genres has resulted in confusion, unanswered questions, and a variety of attempts. We are seeking guidance from AASL to provide answers and guidance in this popular trend. Is it a viable way of arranging library materials; and if so, please help in setting standards and appropriate genres for different age levels.” The concern was put forth because KASL members hoped to get this guidance and dispel the confusion arising from the many attempts of Kansas school librarians. We believed Kansas school librarians weren’t alone, and that belief was affirmed when the Affiliate Assembly voted to send the concern forward.

Susan Ballard, AASL president at the time, organized a panel to discuss the issue at ALA Midwinter in Seattle. I was part of the panel and approached the topic from the standpoint of the Dewey Decimal Classification system being a universal, practical method of arranging books, a method that supports groundwork for skills instruction begun in elementary schools and built upon through other levels.

I am a middle school librarian in Garden City on the plains of western Kansas. My school has an enrollment of 796 seventh- and eighth-graders. Our district has 46.9 percent ELL students, 71 percent economically disadvantaged, and 68–70 percent who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Our district educates a large number of transient students; therefore, the need for consistent library-skills instruction is a priority. Our district’s elementary school librarians work diligently to instruct our students in the use of DDC and the online public access catalog. The skills students develop allow them to feel comfortable when they move to another school or visit the public library. I believe students deserve to walk into a new library and have the skills to feel at home. As our students progress to middle school and high school they explore and establish their individual reading habits, but still apply basic knowledge of library use.

My job has many facets that include building relationships between old knowledge and new, helping to ensure that students are effective users of information and fostering skills that enable them to think, read, and research successfully. This success depends on their being comfortable in the library environment and will be achieved only when the students have the knowledge needed to use the library. It is imperative that we make the school library friendly and easy to use.

I use an abundance of signage to “announce” the placement of special displays containing resources not shelved in their usual locations. Currently, I have a “Chick Lit” section for teen drama (see figure 1), a “Books with Bite” section for fiction focused on vampires, and sections for war fiction and sports fiction. At the beginning of each school year, I also intermix some sports nonfiction with the sports fiction (see figure 2) to create interest and get the students familiar with the flow of our school library. I can arrange, rearrange, or eliminate these sections as interest grows or wanes. When nonfiction that was intermixed with genre fiction is moved back into the nonfiction section, the transition is smooth for students. For instance, I tell them nonfiction sports books are always found in the 796s. This knowledge allows the students to move into the stacks and become familiar with the arrangement. I keep my labels to two numbers after the decimal point to facilitate students’ finding books.

Keeping a uniform, basic arrangement of the school library is essential if students are to be comfortable finding resources in other libraries. Two questions that must be answered if a new
system were to be devised are: Who would decide on the particulars of that system? What criteria would be used to make the decision to ensure that use of the system would be universal and not regional? A major problem would arise if each school library implemented a different system or a portion of a system. Other questions that must be answered include: Should the entire Dewey Decimal Classification system be ditched in school libraries? Or would a new system be a revamping that included rearrangement of the nonfiction and fiction into genres? Our initial concern was about genre-fying as opposed to ditching the current system. If a new system were to be developed, school librarians would have to relabel and reorganize entire collections. They would have to spend valuable time reprocessing and updating the MARC records. The time commitment would be huge!

Of course, I encourage all school librarians to do what is best for their library patrons, but I hope that we won’t tie the hands of librarians, hindering their ability to be creative when making displays, creating signage, and arranging book shelves. I will...
continue to make sections as the needs of my users dictate, but I don’t see the need to do a universal change from the Dewey Decimal Classification system.

The original action requested by KASL was: “If genre classification is determined to be a viable way of arranging library materials then it is our hope that AASL will help set standards and appropriate genres for different age levels.” I think the key word is “viable”; I’d be sorry to see anyone make a change based only on an impulse. Any rearrangement should be a consistent method that would be in the best interest of all library users, especially students.

Juanita Jameson is school librarian at Horace J. Good Middle School in Unified School District 457 in Garden City, Kansas. She is the immediate past president of the Kansas Association of School Librarians. She has been a school librarian for twenty-two years and has experience in grades Pre-K–8 in public and parochial schools. She is also AASL Affiliate Assembly recording secretary.
This is the Dewey Police!
We have a search warrant. Where have you hidden your biographies, and why are your graphic novels not in proper Dewey shelf order? And what is this? You have truncated the call number for modern televisions with apps instead of leaving it as the required 384.5502854678? How dare you?

Luckily the Dewey Police do not really exist, or we would likely all be in quite a bit of trouble. School libraries cannot follow all of the requirements of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). A full implementation that follows all of the rules is simply too complex for our patrons and our collections. The idea of a first-grade student trying to puzzle out a number with ten places after the decimal is silly. This is a decimal place indicating a level of precision that goes beyond what scientists refer to as “nano.”

Given the history of DDC, we should not be surprised that using it in school libraries requires a great deal of compromise. This is a classification system designed for libraries with great swaths of number ranges that are rarely, if ever, found in elementary libraries. More problematic when considering the placement of books about modern televisions is the reality that the schedule of numbers is dominated by issues of prominent importance to a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (and slightly bigoted) male in 1876.

Recent innovations like cars and airplanes are all crammed into 629, other branches of engineering. The DDC system has certainly been revised, but the past 137 years of updates have come at the expense of numerical overload. The solution to fitting every type of vehicle that didn’t exist a mere twelve years after the Civil War ended has been to add decimal places onto the ubiquitous 629. While that solution works, it has created a numbering system that is a bit complicated for younger readers.

Why, then, is the desire for a more suitable classification system that meets the unique needs of school libraries and students so controversial? The goal is not to tear down DDC, but rather to explore different types of shelving systems that better represent current school collections and ever-changing priorities for our libraries. With all due respect for a 137-year-old solution to problems and limitations of physical organization that no longer exist, online catalogs have changed the library environment.

False Dichotomy
Fear not, moving away from the DDC system will not result in our libraries descending into chaos. This is not a discussion of DDC as compared to just piling books up willy nilly, but rather a reasoned review of how a different—yet just as carefully developed within the scope of information science—classification system might be employed to make school libraries more accessible for students and teachers.

This article is not about comparing DDC with other systems; instead, it focuses on how a new system might be designed using some aspects of DDC and ideas from other systems to create something that works for school libraries. By definition, any
such classification system will, of course, be designed around an explicit set of rules. Concerns about students being overwhelmed when coming into a library that isn’t using DDC are quite overblown. No rational, professional librarian would shelve books without some type of replicable, definable, teachable system. Moving from the individualization that inevitably results as school libraries try to make DDC work for their situations to a newly designed system built specifically for school libraries might actually result in more order rather than more chaos.

The 2020 School Library

As any change of the scope being considered here takes years to implement, let us not seek to design a classification system for the school library of today, but rather for the school library of 2020. What will our collections look like? What new subjects will we have to incorporate into the system? Will a physical collection even exist?

Having spent the past three years representing AASL on the American Library Association’s Digital Content and Libraries Working Group, and the Equitable Access to Digital Content Presidential Task Force before that, I still feel quite confident in saying that 2020 school libraries will still contain physical collections requiring classification. The 2020 collection will look quite different than it did in the past fifty years. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and other bills like the National Defense Authorization Act provided over $100 million for the purchase of school library materials, mostly nonfiction that could help secure the United States’ position during the Cold War. Many of these books can still be found on our shelves today. Those materials cannot, however, continue to exist on school library shelves in 2020.

The purpose and nature of our nonfiction collections have changed quite drastically over the ten years since I joined the school library world. Our physical collections are no longer the sole—or even primary—source of knowledge in the school as they have been in the past. Reference resources are already digitized for the most part; moving forward, general book collections for research purposes will also become increasingly digital. When I have assisted in weeding efforts in the past year, the nonfiction collections have typically been reduced by about half.

Weeding is not just about getting rid of old books or inaccurate books; it is just as importantly about staying current with the subjects and student interests of the day. The national rollout of the Common Core State Standards, including the new science standards and still undeveloped social studies content standards, has greatly changed the grades in which certain topics are taught. This change means our collection of resources on those topics must change as well. And if we are already enacting drastic changes to our nonfiction sections, why not go that one step further and use this as an opportunity to rethink the classification system as well?

In 2020 the school library won’t have a nonfiction section as we currently know it, but rather a collection of informational books intended for reading and exploring more than research. Filled with high-interest and literary texts on a broad range of topics, this section will meet instructional requirements for informational texts to supplement instruction, as well as the individual needs of students who prefer to read informational books. As such, the classification system used in 2020 can be a bit more fluid in its structure, more focused on browsing within a topic as opposed to locating a specific monograph. The rigidity of a numerical system with nano-precision will naturally give way to a subject-oriented system similar to that found in bookstores.

Not exactly like bookstores, though, which use BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communications) Subject Headings as published by the Book Industry Study Group. It would not be much of an improvement to change from a numerical system focused on broader public library collections to a subject system designed for bookstores. Our 2020 school library deserves a custom solution designed specifically for school library needs, a system where the topics make sense given the collection and audience.

As we establish parameters for the new system, let us dream big. What other attributes could help this 2020 school library classification system function more effectively and efficiently? But don’t throw the baby out with the Dewey Decimal System. What works well within DDC? What features should be carried over?

School Library Classification in 2020

In designing a new school library classification system for 2020 and beyond, three primary considerations must be at the very core of the system. First, it must be student-oriented. Therefore, it must be extensible in such a way as to accommodate the more limited vocabulary (and collection) found in an elementary library as well as the complexities of a high school library supporting college-level courses.
Secondly, the new system must be flexible enough to grow and develop over the next one hundred years in a natural and fluid way that maintains the structure and simplicity of the initial system. Finally, the school library classification system for 2020 and beyond must be built with full awareness that the dominance of print-based resources is rapidly declining. This system must be designed to work in harmony with future digital storage, discovery, and retrieval patterns while still meeting current physical needs.

**Student-Oriented**

Designing a classification system that is student-oriented includes both the obvious nature of using age-appropriate vocabulary, but also the more subtle aspect of using curriculum-aligned vocabulary. Let us return to that crowded realm of DDC 629 for an example of age-appropriate vocabulary. Instead of using vernacular terms like “cars” or “trucks,” DDC refers to motor land vehicles (629.2) and passenger automobiles (629.222). A more student-oriented system could have a section on vehicles that included cars, trucks, buses, airplanes, ships, trains, etc.

To help teachers and students locate resources easily, the vocabulary used in the library classification system should also be aligned with terms used in the classroom. For example, it might be helpful for a school system to group together science, technology, engineering, and math subjects into the STEM grouping to which curriculum documents refer. This approach is not that different from DDC in which math is grouped with the sciences and technology includes engineering. Focusing on students’ browsing patterns, however, I would strongly suggest moving at least animals and maybe plants from the STEM section into a separate nature area. This change, especially in the elementary library, would probably make finding this popular section more obvious for students.

Other high-level groupings might include social studies, health, art, music, and whatever term the state uses for foreign languages. (In New York, it is “Languages Other Than English” or LOTE.) Since we are building this new classification system using modern technologies and preparing for the future, we can confidently state that having different terms in different states for languages other than English will not be an issue. Computer systems can be easily programmed to understand LOTE or any other synonym as referring to the root concept of foreign languages.

As this 2020 school library classification system is being imagined and designed, comprehensive reviews of students’ browsing and borrowing patterns will likely illuminate the answers to shelving questions that arise. In a sense, we need to study our library users as anthropologists would, asking questions about whether students who browse for or check out books about tanks are more likely to also want books about cars or books about the army? By combining this action–research type of study with a curriculum review we can work to ensure a student-oriented classification system.

**Flexible Growth**

A second key feature of a new school library classification system will be flexibility for growth (and contraction) of the taxonomy to meet changing needs and local vocabulary. As was already discussed, a common set of terms could be easily adapted to meet state curriculum designations using a set of synonym definitions. Other techniques and technologies can be employed to create a more dynamic system that uses subject headings and a set of rules to define a hierarchical classification structure that can grow larger without becoming more complex.

For example, the section for sciences will need to grow dynamically depending on the level of the school served by the library. High schools will likely have more resources, both print and digital, on physics, chemistry,
and biology. Elementary science tends to focus more on Earth and space topics, animals, and weather. One way to easily allow for dynamic growth and contraction is to establish rules for organic changes within a hierarchy instead of attempting to publish full schedules of terms. In this case, DDC provides a very workable model within the base-ten numerical system.

By using a five-level hierarchy of Domains>Sections>Subjects>Topics>Subtopics and then placing books under subtopics (and feel free to not use these subjectively created terms) one can easily classify one million resources with a single simple rule. Just start stacking up books that are about the same thing. When you get to more than 10 books in the stack, carefully examine the stack to determine how it could be divided into two stacks of books with each stack covering a different subtopic. When you get to 10 subtopics, again divide the 10 subtopics into two stacks of subtopics, each covering a different topic. Follow this rule of 10 up the chain (or down from the top) and the six powers of 10 results in a unique classification of one million books into a possible 100,000 subtopics, 10,000 topics, 1,000 subjects, 100 sections, and 10 domains.

For an example of this hierarchy, consider your sports collection. How many books on football do you have? More than 10? Enough to create subtopics for how to play football vs. football teams? But wait...too many teams, so let's break them into topics for AFC teams vs. NFC teams, and then we can have subtopics for the divisions. If your collection has too many different sports, you might even need to create new sections for ball sports vs. other sports. In the end, the classification for football books might look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain = Play</th>
<th>Play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section = Sports</td>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject = Football</td>
<td>Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic = AFC Teams</td>
<td>Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtopic = AFC East</td>
<td>No Subtopic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books = Books on the Buffalo Bills</td>
<td>Books on how to play football</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Digital Harmony

The final aspect we need to consider for the 2020 school library classification is the increasing digitization of our collections. The DDC system was designed 137 years ago to solve a problem of physical location of materials in libraries with inadequate catalogs and inexact shelving patterns. This problem is not an issue today; our computer catalogs can store and display a single, exact physical location of a book while simultaneously displaying that same physical resource in multiple virtual areas of the collection. Fully digital resources, of course, can simultaneously exist within multiple virtual domains, subjects, genres, or whatever else we want to use for classification.

DDC was built around the concept of collocation; books on similar subjects would be shelved in close proximity. The limitations of physical shelving and physical catalog cards, however, corrupted the vision and weakened the system. Biographies about scientists ended up separated from books about the science they did. Books about horses might be found under 599 (mammalia) if they were wild mustangs, 636 (animal husbandry) for working horses on a farm, or 798 (equestrian sports) for horses bred to compete. Nowhere could a shelf of books about horses be found—and certainly no shelf containing both informational books and stories about horses. But in a digital library, these shelves can exist virtually.

Some have asked if discussing classification and shelving systems as purchasing print resources declines is like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. I would disagree. Strenuously. Imagine the largest library in the world, Google’s search database. It currently is estimated (by <www.worldwidewebsize.com>) at about 50 billion pages. Now imagine trying to find a single page in those 50 billion. But what if you had only 10 pages to consider; that reduction would make finding one page quite a bit easier. By expanding the classification scheme outlined above to 10 levels of hierarchy, up to 99 billion webpages could be cataloged.

It would take a while—and lots of really smart people programming lots more really powerful computers—but, in the end, it is the same sorting
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The first time someone in a library looks at a pile of books and starts thinking about other ways to group them, classification is being rediscovered, and new doors are opening. In my region, I watched reclassification happen in two different libraries with amazing success.

Let us now pledge that over the next two years we will carefully deliberate and consider all aspects of this issue so that the Knowledge Quest issue focused on the 2015 conference can announce the formation of a new system for school library classification.

Let’s Get Started

Now this is a pretty big vision. Somehow we went from weeding a few nonfiction titles to suddenly classifying the entire Web. Don’t worry. Remember, the task has to start somewhere with a first step. The first time someone in a library looks at a pile of books and starts thinking about other ways to group them, classification is being rediscovered, and new doors are opening. In my region, I watched reclassification happen in two different libraries with amazing success. They worked it all out; I was honored just to watch and have a chance to report on their progress as they reimagined and reinvigorated their libraries. What will you do to reinvigorate your library collection?

It doesn’t have to be as drastic as a whole new classification system. Even small steps like genre-based fiction collections or temporary fiction/informational combined displays can go a long way toward creating a new environment. But if you are serious about moving from DDC toward a more student-centered classification system created explicitly to meet the unique needs of school libraries, then let’s get started.
It all started with a little furniture rearranging, but, as anyone who has ever done any remodeling knows, one thing leads to another. And pretty soon you’re redoing the whole dang house. Dewey, like the proverbial old house, had great bones and a solid foundation, but an inefficient layout. At times it felt like the refrigerator, stove, and sink were in separate rooms. You can still cook a meal but not easily.

So it was with Dewey for our students: usable, but not user-friendly. We tried a makeover by trimming off numbers and going with just the 10s classifications, but it soon became apparent this reduction wasn’t enough. Our shelving system needed a complete rebuild.

Our goal was to make our classification system work harder for the students and not the students working hard to understand the system. We began with a good understanding of how our students (mainly grades Pre-K–4) liked to search for books. Here's what we knew:

- They wanted to know if something was real (nonfiction) or pretend (fiction).
- They liked things grouped in broad, general categories. For example, “Where are the animal books?”
- They didn’t make correlations between nonfiction books on a particular subject and a biography on the same subject—for example, a biography of Anne Frank and the Holocaust/World War II section.
- They memorized where their favorite books were located and were unaware of the subjects and classifications. Saying a book was in the 630 section did not mean anything to them.
- They didn’t make correlations between subjects that were related to one another, but in separate sections of the library—for example, a book on aircraft carriers (in transportation) and books on the Navy (military science).

With this information in mind, our first move was simple: to separate the school library into two sections, fiction and nonfiction. This change included moving fairy tales, poetry, and mythology into fiction—really now the story section vs. the information section.

Next we outlined the library into broad categories:

**Social Studies** (history and social science)

**Natural Sciences** (math and technology, physical science, earth science, biology, zoology, pets)

**Technology** (farming, cooking, transportation, construction/engineering)

**Arts and Recreation** (arts, music, movies, games, sports)
Once the main outline was decided, grouping our specific subjects accordingly was fairly easy. Based on our children’s searching habits, we decided to put all animals (including pets) together. We broke the animal section into the following groups:

**Vertebrate:**
- Mammals (A–Z)
- Reptiles
- Amphibians
- Fish
- Birds

**Invertebrate:**
- Insects and Spiders
- Crustaceans
- Other (mollusks, worms, jellyfish)

**Pets**

We also decided to interfile biographies within their subject matter to help our students make connections between the two genres. For example, a student interested in baseball may also be interested in learning more about a famous player, such as Babe Ruth, or a student interested in airplanes might like to read about the Wright Brothers. Since making this decision, circulation of biographies has increased significantly.

To aid our students even further and make the school library more user-friendly, we incorporated signage, using three different methods. First, we placed bright yellow signs over each section indicating the overall subject:

**History**
- U.S. History
- Social Science
- Language Arts
- Science and Technology
- Earth Science
- Nature
- Animals
- Pets
- Farming and Cooking
- Transportation
- Arts and Crafts
- Music and Movies
- Fun and Games
- Sports and Recreation

**Art**
- Drawing
- Crafts

Next we labeled each shelf for classification (within the subject). For example the Arts and Crafts section has the following shelves:

**For further clarification, we used vertical shelf labels to help separate classes of information on a shelf. For example, the “Craft” shelf has vertical separations for paper crafts, holiday crafts, textile crafts, etc. Our labels also have pictures to help even our youngest students find the books they love.**

In addition to being more user-friendly, our system works with the Common Core State Standards initiative. That is, it is text/vocabulary based, and promotes student discovery and self-directed learning. Students are able to see the overall classification of how and why a subject is where it is. For example, earthquakes and tornadoes are part of the study of earth science, which is part of the natural sciences. Animals are divided into species. Children will learn that dolphins are not fish but mammals. Countries are organized by continents. Children will learn that England is considered part of the continent of Europe.

Another goal was to help students make connections and correlations between similar subjects. We wanted subjects to naturally flow together. For example, we put meteorology and environmental science together since their subjects overlap. (Dewey had them separated.) We put military science with military vehicles, motorsports with cars, etc.

We replaced Dewey numbers in our online catalog and on book spines with text, too. For example, a biography on Tom Brady would have “Sports and Rec.” and “Football” as its subject and classification. Students look for the bookcase “Sports and Rec.” and the shelf labeled “Football.”

The remodel has been a huge success with our students. We achieved our goal. Students easily move from one subject to the next, reading the signage and finding the books they love — and discovering new ones too! The school library is working hard for them.
Introduction

As knowledge brokers, we are living in interesting times for libraries and librarians. We wonder sometimes if our traditional tools like the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system can cope with the onslaught of information. The categories provided don’t always seem adequate for the knowledge-discovery habits of today’s patrons. They have grown accustomed to new ways for their information needs to be met, from the fire-and-forget style of a hard-to-control classic Google search to the pervasive, always-on style of Google Now, anticipating users’ information needs without their having even asked a verbal question.

Contrariwise, I believe that we, as librarians, could be making better use of our tools. Many (like the DDC) are a reflection of the same social and epistemological forces that brought about modernity at the turn of the last century. We as librarians are in the unique position of providing services that are as ground-breaking as these tools.

As we see the need to provide unique and cutting-edge knowledge discovery to our users, I will argue in this article that the DDC can play a key role in fulfilling this purpose,
if we start thinking about how Dewey can help us solve today’s problems, rather than applying and displaying numbers in the same way we have always done.

**Being Verbal: Captions and Relative Index Terms**

**Numbers Are Good, But Users Need More**

From the very beginning, for a variety of good reasons, usage of Dewey was focused on the numbers as identifiers. One of these reasons is the language-independent nature of Arabic numerals; others include the ability of the notational system to carry relationships between facets, to express hierarchy, and also to take advantage of a mnemonic characteristic: specifically, that similar numbers are often about similar things. However, we have not spent enough time developing and supplying resolution mechanisms that will lead a user to the subject or topic that the number identifies.

The Dewey number is an iconic, ingenious shorthand for a subject category, transforming a physical space into an intellectual one. But to reap any benefits from this transformation, the categories must be communicated to the patron in different ways, not just as bare Dewey numbers.
In this context, an argument I sometimes hear is this: "Why do we use decimals for a school library, even though most of the children haven't even learned what decimals are?" While the DDC notation may have many things wrong with it, this issue is not one of them. Dewey numbers are not really decimals. The decimal point that follows the third digit is just a typographical device to break up the number; it has no significance. The numbers stand for the same thing, with or without the decimal point.

DDC provides much to explore beyond the numbers. The classification system provides two major sources for verbal category description: captions and Relative Index terms.

**Descriptive Captions**

Captions are headings describing a Dewey number. Unfortunately, in many cases these descriptions are not used to make the system more accessible to library users, be they teachers or students. This failure is all the more puzzling because the subject descriptions encapsulated in captions are published in multiple languages; these captions add to the value of language-independent Dewey numbers. Revealing captions to library users can facilitate serving a community that requires access in multiple languages while searching the catalog and browsing the shelves.

Captions for a given Dewey number are, of course, available in the subscription service WebDewey, but a simple and free way of looking them up is at dewey.info, DDC’s linked data and Web services hub. A simple URL request like <http://dewey.info/class/641/> is all that is needed. And because dewey.info is indexed by search engines, an even quicker way to look up just about any Dewey number is available; try searching for it directly using Google. For example, a search on “698.9 Dewey” brings up a list of links with <http://dewey.info/class/698.9/e23/2012-10-24/about.en> first on the list.

**Relative Index Terms**

Relative Index terms also provide additional verbal descriptions by naming subjects that fall in the scope of a given class. Terms appearing in the Relative Index may be narrower in scope than the description given by the caption because topics in “standing room” (i.e., without sufficient literature and narrower in scope than the class as a whole) are also included, but especially useful are those that can provide important access terms.

Let’s look at an example of how the Relative Index shows the relationships between subjects and disciplines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Dewey Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>641.3526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic—botany</td>
<td>584.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic—cooking</td>
<td>641.6526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic—food</td>
<td>641.3526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic—garden crop</td>
<td>635.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic—pharmacology</td>
<td>615.32433</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Garlic appears numerous times in the classification, namely in the context of food and drink, botany, agriculture, and medicine. The first number given (641.3526) indicates the class to be used for interdisciplinary works about garlic, which is the same number for garlic in food.

Note that the (sometimes narrower) subjects provided in the Relative Index may be more helpful for guiding users than the broader captions of the classes in which a subject appears; for example, the caption of 584.33 is “Alliaceae.” Enumerating some Relative Index terms (such as chives, garlic, leeks, onions, shallots) may sometimes give the user a better idea of what can be found in the class than does the caption itself.

Besides providing an additional source of subject terminology, the Relative Index can also be helpful for collocating works into “subject neighborhoods,” discussed later.

**Following Your Nose: Power of Semantic Relationships in DDC**

But we shouldn’t be looking only at numbers and captions. While the position of a class in the Dewey hierarchy is mainly expressed though its notation, a rich network of relationships is established through other means that are lesser known and, therefore, rarely used to enhance end users’ topical searching and browsing.
For example, the length of the class number 576.8 Evolution determines its place in the notational hierarchy. The broader topic will usually be represented by a number that is one digit shorter, whereas narrower topics will usually be one digit longer. However, the notes associated with this class provide references to topics that are also directly subordinate, but outside of the notational hierarchy. Figure 1 shows part of the relationships network for 576.8. Besides showing directly subordinate topics in the notational hierarchy (marked NT [narrower topic]), additional references connect the class to narrower topics outside of the hierarchical array (marked NS [narrower structural]), namely 579.138, 581.38, and 591.38, for the topic of evolution discussed in the context of microorganisms, plants, or animals, respectively. Also note the repetition of 138 as a mnemonic device indicating the close relationship—the common trait of evolution—of these numbers, which are directly subordinate to 576.8 Evolution. Also, a “related topic” relationship links the class to 231.7652 Creationism.

Much more can be said about the relationship framework, but let’s stop here and ask how we can make it useful for the end user. One possible way is to include selected relationships as signage or in the user experience of the catalog, creating an atmosphere of exploration and serendipity.

Another, more radical approach would be to use these relationships as a basis for collocating material. The latter is an option, especially if a library places a higher emphasis on the phenomenon of evolution rather than on the realization of such a topic in specific disciplines such as microbiology, botany, or zoology. This collocation creates a cluster often called a “subject neighborhood.” If a library chooses to go down this path, DDC offers more powerful tools for expressing local viewpoints in a deterministic and interoperable manner.

**Finding Your Perspective: Using Mappings, Creating Neighborhoods**

**Discipline-Based or Phenomenon-Based?**

A common criticism of the DDC is that topics are scattered across the classification because subjects can appear multiple times if they play a role in several disciplines. “That’s all fair enough,” you may respond, “but where are the works about military tanks? Where can I find books about terrorism?” While Dewey remains discipline-based, a phenomenon-based approach can seem more intuitive because it tries to reflect what a thing is in the world, not its location in a field of study. We have to be careful, however, not to be carried away by the lure of a “natural order of things/phenomena”; it is a chimera. All classification efforts have to make hard and sometimes arbitrary-looking choices about how to arrange things in the world. What is a neoplasm? Is it a disease or a mass of tissue? It can be both, of course, depending on viewpoint.

However, focusing on phenomena can be helpful for certain topic clusters, although it usually causes problems when applied to the shelf arrangement of large collections. Arguably, a much greater likeness exists between the pharmacology of garlic and the pharmacology of opium than between the pharmacology of garlic and cooking with garlic.

But, as described in the last section, the Relative Index or the relationships expressed through notes already link topics when they are present in multiple disciplines. Other onboard tools allow going a step further; Dewey can be used to support a more phenomenon-based view for instances where such a view works better for your collections. The key is to leverage the work that Dewey as a system already does,

**Figure 1. Relationships network for 576.8 Evolution.**
instead of thinking about greener pastures elsewhere and starting over with a new system.

**Dewey as Common Denominator**

In fact, DDC has been mapped to a number of other knowledge organization systems as can be seen in figure 2. These mappings not only broaden the verbal access to Dewey numbers by adding related terms in multiple languages, they also let Dewey act as a backbone system, a common denominator for switching between materials indexed with these vocabularies. WebDewey contains selected mappings to LCSH (Library of Congress Subject Headings), MeSH (Medical Subject Headings), Sears, and BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communication) subject headings.

**Resource Neighborhoods**

In a school library use case, these mappings can be used to support perspectives on locally relevant resources categorized with Dewey without switching to a different system altogether. Mapping allows the DDC to act in the background, managing the association to different subject-heading systems like BISAC, while still retaining some degree of interoperability with other libraries using Dewey or a Dewey mapping as the basis for a browsable shelf arrangement.

Let’s look again at a specific example. One glance at the printed Relative Index (the electronic version adds even more terms) should tell us that works about terrorism are scattered across the DDC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Dewey Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>363.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism—criminology</td>
<td>364.1317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism—criminology—law</td>
<td>345.02317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism—ethics</td>
<td>172.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism—international relations</td>
<td>327.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism—prevention</td>
<td>363.32517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism—prevention—management</td>
<td>658.473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism—social conflict</td>
<td>303.625</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a small school library collection, where a discipline-based approach may not make as much sense as in a large research collection, a good starting point for creating a neighborhood could be the available BISAC mapping (see figure 3).

Currently, the BISAC term “POLITICAL SCIENCE—Political Freedom & Security—Terrorism” is mapped only to the sociology number 303.625 and to the social problems and services number 363.325 (which is also the interdisciplinary number). With these two numbers, the BISAC mapping provides an excellent starting point for collocating into a single neighborhood most of the works associated with a narrower definition of terrorism. The mapping also provides the BISAC heading, a bookstore-style term, which can be used for shelf signage (if this practice makes sense in the context of a local collection).

Dewey neighborhoods can be created on any scale. The above example shows the process on a fairly granular scale, but other libraries, like Darien Library, a Connecticut public library, chose to create eight rather large neighborhoods (“glades”), collocating all non-English languages (from the 400s) and all travel (from the 910s) into a Places glade, for example.

Naturally, these approaches have both benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, creating subject neighborhoods based on Dewey terminology leverages the DDC as a community resource; this arrangement means less work for the staff of an individual library compared to maintaining an original, tailor-made system.

On the other hand, going down this path makes it harder to use some other key value propositions of Dewey, such as being able to serve a multilingual population by relying on both...
the language-independent representation of topics enabled by the DDC and also the multilingual presentation of core Dewey terminology. Also, this neighborhood approach potentially fragments DDC use and confounds DDC users. A student may be surprised to find a different arrangement of topics (at least on the surface) in the public library than in the school library.

One of the newest additions to the set of mapped vocabularies is GeoNames, a huge database of geographic entities. The mapping was created specifically to take advantage of the Dewey Decimal Classification system as linked data, so before exploring some of the exciting possibilities opening up for Dewey-driven knowledge discovery, I would like to invite you to a very quick visit to DDC’s linked-data platform (that also doubles as a Web service API).

Going Headless: Dewey.info

Linked data in a library context means, in a nutshell, publishing data in the same way Web documents are published, that is, identified by URLs, openly available, with meaningful links to other data resources. In short, producing linked data demands a complete recasting of library metadata for the Semantic Web.

Dewey.info <http://dewey.info> is the platform for Dewey linked data. On a practical level, this resource enables access to all assignable classes in DDC 23 by using simple URL patterns, and, because the data published at dewey.info is available under a Creative Commons license, it can be freely reused by any library—a big benefit for libraries that need signage in languages other than English.

While dewey.info is, in essence, a machine-to-machine service, it still offers benefits to users accessing it with a Web browser. A simple caption lookup is just a URL request away; an example is <http://dewey.info/class/945.5/about>. Languages and versions can be targeted specifically and independently, for example, <http://dewey.info/class/946/about.es> for the Spanish translation, or <http://dewey.info/class/946/e23/> for only Edition 23 data.

Dewey.info also provides Web services around DDC data, services that are tailored for specific use cases. A great example for this is a Web service that generates a shelf label “dough piece,” which can then be customized for local use. Let’s look at an example <http://oc.fc/Zd09px> (see figure 4).

Based on the Dewey number, the Web service pulls together captions in two languages, converts a user-provided URL containing the DDC number into a QR code, and then generates a vector image for further processing. This resource allows a library to quickly create multilingual signage with minimal fuss. In the example above, the QR code contains a link to the mobile version of WorldCat.org, showing relevant material classed in 946.

Based on experimentation using this service, the Scottish Library and Information Council has implemented an automatic workflow to create library signage in English and Scottish Gaelic for Highland Council libraries, starting with Portree Community Library on the Isle of Skye (see figure 5). In case you were wondering: yes, there is a Scottish Gaelic translation of the DDC Summaries (available at dewey.info)!
Taking It Apart and Putting It Back Together: Dewey-Driven Discovery

The true power of Dewey as a cutting-edge knowledge-discovery tool today becomes apparent when putting all of these pieces together for the benefit of information seekers. How can Dewey help users with exploratory searching—searching for stuff they don’t already know about?

Let’s step back for a second and again look at the Dewey number. In essence, the DDC as a system is a number-building engine. Only a tiny fraction of all the numbers used in WorldCat at any given moment are spelled out in the classification. The rest of the numbers are built using facets contained mostly in auxiliary tables. In the past, it was very hard to decompose these sometimes very long numbers to make use of the components (geographic areas, time periods, languages, etc.) for retrieval of catalog records or shelved books. In other words, it was nearly impossible to unbake the cake.

Fortunately, a series of improvements in the way Dewey data is captured and stored has made it possible to access number components directly. For example, if a number is created in WebDewey using the number-building assistant, the number is automatically saved together with a complete recipe describing the building process (see figure 6).

The complex number 394.12095190904 gets broken down into its major components, making it easy to retrace how the number was built and what it is about, namely, cultural history of food in twentieth-century Korea.

One of the major benefits of keeping Dewey numbers easily decodable is that mappings can now target facets directly, especially the mappings of Table 2 numbers (the geographic table). The mapping of these numbers to GeoNames entities offers opportunities to extend the boundaries of categorization and discovery because GeoNames, as a linked-data vocabulary, contains descriptions of places, not just descriptions of concepts of places, as library subject-heading systems usually do. These links allow for a completely new viewpoint on the arrangement of classes in Dewey, a view based on spatial relationships (see figure 7).

This approach to Dewey numbers is new and recognizes that their expressive power doesn’t end when a book has found its place on the shelf (sometimes affectionately called “mark and park”). Rather, for the benefit of end users, we must consider making evident as many elements of the classification as possible throughout the entire lifecycle of a resource. Depending on the requirements of the library’s clientele, elements revealed can be captions, index terms and mappings, or number components. DDC can now be used as a driver for cutting-edge knowledge discovery in the catalog or on the shelves.
adjacent to Niger, instead of having to consult the Dewey-specific arrangement as expressed in the classification. As this switching happens in the background, a user can even be presented with a map without ever having to see a single Dewey number, yet the classification is still doing all the heavy lifting.

As this example shows, DDC number components mapped to vocabularies outside of the classic realm of library data are a powerful combination that allows Dewey data to work harder for library users. Such mapping allows for serendipitously exploring the intellectual space created by the classification, without forcing the user to learn the specific way DDC arranges places and time periods. Rather, the user can just pick from a map or a timeline, change the search question, and explore new stuff.

Making It Better: Community Involvement

Dewey is a community resource that is dependent on user input to stay relevant. DDC team members at OCLC want to engage with DDC users! Please do not hesitate to use all possible avenues to make your voice heard in the Dewey community: through the new user-contribution feature in WebDewey, which allows users to share their built numbers with the editorial team; through the Dewey blog; by sending us your proposals for areas that you think need work; or by keeping us in the loop on Twitter (@DeweyTeam). The DDC is a living and breathing organism; we make changes every day. Why not get involved and let us know what you would like to see changed?

Conclusion

The title of this article is borrowed from an old DDC teaching kit still available in the Dewey collection in the OCLC library. Dewey has come a long way since then, but it still has to overcome some questionable, but nevertheless entrenched, opinions about its nature and utility.

I certainly didn’t want to present a “you are holding it wrong” argument. My primary intention has been to showcase some characteristics of the system that are either rarely recognized or have changed so dramatically over the years that they seem to warrant a change in how Dewey is applied and how you can make it work for your patrons. I hope that I was able to give you a glimpse of the richness and potential of the system and also kindle some excitement—because so much of this richness still waits to be fully exploited by all of you for the benefit of library users.

Michael Panzer currently serves as the tenth editor-in-chief of the Dewey Decimal Classification system. He joined OCLC in May 2007 as global product manager of taxonomy services and was appointed assistant editor of DDC in March 2009. From 2002 to 2005 he headed the technical team that translated Dewey into German. He was the first member of a Dewey translation team to be appointed assistant editor. Michael served on the W3C Library Linked Data Incubator Group and on the W3C Provenance Working Group.

Prior to joining OCLC, he worked at Cologne University of Applied Sciences, where he was team leader of CrissCross, a research project funded by the German Research Foundation focused on cross-mapping German (SWD), French (RAMEAU), and U.S. (LCSH) subject heading systems with the DDC.
CREATING A DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CLASSIFICATION FOR YOUR CHILDREN’S COLLECTIONS
We are four librarians who have come together as a creative team at Ethical Culture School in New York City. As elementary school librarians, our goal is to develop and support curriculum where children’s developmental needs are given central importance. By putting the thinking, interests, information needs, and the information-seeking behavior of children first, we aim to eliminate the barriers that our young users face in accessing and using our collections to their fullest potential.

Metis was created as an alternative to the Dewey Decimal Classification system. Our goal was to encourage productive independent browsing by children as well as allow for successful catalog searching by elementary students, thereby helping to keep libraries relevant in today’s ever-changing technological world.

Using Dewey

For most school librarians working with Pre-K through fourth- or fifth-grade students, “classifying by Dewey” assumes sections for nonfiction, biographies, picture books, and fiction. When we began our exploration three years ago, we wanted to know just how much of our collection was really using Dewey. We discovered that only 43.9 percent of our books were classified with Dewey numbers; the rest were alphabetical by author in fiction and picture book sections and alphabetical by subject in biographies.

Most librarians do not question why their libraries use Dewey (or Library of Congress) schemes. These librarians have too little time and too many responsibilities to take on this meta-question. But we would argue that to continue to remain relevant and be responsive to the needs of our users we must ask the questions: “Why do we organize this way?” and “Is this a good way to shelve books?”

To answer these questions, librarians first need to ask, “How do our users approach finding materials in the library?”

Library users have two primary ways to search for books, other than asking a librarian. A patron can search in the catalog or browse the shelves. To search for a book a patron has to type in a search term, find the call number, write the call number down, take the call number to the shelf, and locate the book on the shelf. If all that’s needed is a system that allows patrons to search in the catalog and find a book by call number, libraries do not need a subject-based system. Classifying by acquisition would be perfectly suitable.

However, there must be a reason why subject order was chosen by Dewey to organize the physical collection. We found the answer in the first edition of Dewey Decimal Classification on Project Gutenberg (Dewey 1876). The prevailing system at the time was one in which each item had a fixed location on the shelves.

By putting the thinking, interests, information needs, and the information-seeking behavior of children first, we aim to eliminate the barriers that our young users face in accessing and using our collections to their fullest potential.

Shelving by Subject

So why do librarians use a shelving system arranged by subject?

According to A. C. Foskett, whose textbook is used in library schools, “There will be many occasions when readers will approach the collection without any particular need in mind but wishing instead to be able to select items at random. To help in this situation, our system should permit browsing; a reader should be able to follow a casual train of thought as well as a planned search” (1996, 26). He continued by asking, “Why is classified shelf arrangement helpful?” and answered: “There are two important reasons. The first is to satisfy the browsing function; readers like to wander round the shelves and find books that attract them” (1996, 213). Similarly, Robert M. Losee has asserted, “the
classification system essentially supplies a browsing path from one document to another” (1995, 45).

The more complicated question we faced was, “How do we transform what works for us as professionals into something that is child-friendly, fosters independence, and promotes joy?” To make sense to children a system must be simple enough that they can understand it; it must also have a strong visual component for pre-readers and early readers. The organization scheme also needs to be intuitive to them and represent their perspective.

While many adults and older students will both search and browse, most young children, when working independently, will only browse. Libraries do a really good job of serving searchers. Readers who know exactly what they want can go to the catalog, look up a book, write down the call number, and locate the book on the shelves. However, libraries often don’t do a very good job of serving browsers.

So if librarians acknowledge that the reason for a subject-based shelving system is to promote browsing, they then surely have to ask: “What kind of subject-based classification system is going to encourage the users of our library to browse productively, so that they are led to books that are of interest to them?” This question puts users at the center of the issue and keeps them there. Ultimately, focusing on users is the essential goal.

What we realized when we began to examine Dewey is that DDC is not developmentally appropriate for children, and the connections are not intuitive. Most children never get beyond the basic ideas of Dewey because the system is too difficult given their stage of intellectual development. As a result, they are not able to browse effectively. In addition, many of the browsing connections that Dewey makes are either out of date or not logical to children. We tell students that the 600s are “about technology.” In DDC order, these are some of the subjects found in the 600s in a typical children’s library:

- Inventions
- Human Body
- Electricity
- Boats and Ships
- Bridges and Tunnels
- Airplanes
- Cars
- Motorcycles
- Space Travel
- Robots
- Gardening
- Pets
- Cooking
- Sewing
- Codes
- Woodworking

Is this the best way to shelve these subjects? Cooking isn’t what kids would call “technology.” To nonlibrarians, books arranged in this manner seem out of order and illogical.

As school librarians interested in best practices we realized that we needed to envision a system that maximizes the physical location of a book for our users. Looking at Dewey through that lens, all of the little nagging issues we find ourselves talking about, such as “Why are railroads under 383, but other transportation is in the 620s?” and “Why is astronomy in 520, but space flight is in 629.4?” become a central problem.
Our First Steps

Organizing fiction by genre, also known as genre-fication, was the easiest place for us to begin our user-centered arrangement of school library resources. The goal was to break down the fiction collection into more manageable pieces, so that users seeking a particular type of book would not be faced with a wall of fiction arranged by author and be unsure of how to find a specific type of book.

We began this process a number of years ago, when we labeled our fiction for middle grades by genre. The categories were adventure, animals, fantasy, historical, mystery, scary, science fiction, and sports. We used subject-classification spine labels but kept the books in author alphabetical order for the entire fiction collection.

The change was by no means good enough. Students who were already confident library users liked the system because it helped them navigate from one author in a genre to another. However, less confident users were just as daunted by the number of books they had to scan through to find something they wanted.

We then took the process a step further by changing the way the fiction books were shelved. Using the labels already on the books, we divided up the fiction by genre. This effort also entailed changing the call numbers in the catalog. Sometimes, reading the book was necessary to make the decision, particularly when a book crossed genres. Should it be mystery or fantasy? Adventure or mystery? (Of course, the catalog is always available to find the book later, regardless of genre assigned.)

The process was time-consuming but also a very good thing to do. In general, we found that arranging fiction by genre assisted those students who needed the greatest support. This benefit far outweighs any difficulties or drawbacks.

Some critics believe that libraries should stick with a strict alphabetical system for fiction arranged by author’s last name. They argue that when a librarian wants to highlight a section of the collection, a special display can be created. However, inclusion in the display makes books unsearchable because they won’t be where the catalog says they are. For example, at our local public library a more or less permanent special shelf is maintained for holiday books for kids. Here are the call numbers for the books on this shelf during the month of February:

J 394.2 B: Hearts, Cupids, and Red Roses (Barth)
J HOLIDAY E C: Minnie and Moo: Will You Be My Valentine? (Cazet)
J HOLIDAY PIC D: Happy Valentine’s Day, Curious George! (Di Angelo)
HOLIDAY J PIC E: A String of Hearts (Elliott)
J HOLIDAY 394.26 F: Valentine Be Mine (Farmer)
J 394.26: Valentine’s Day (Gibbons)
J PIC K: Will You Be My Valentine? (Kroll)
J 394.26 O: Celebrate Valentine’s Day (Otto)
J HOLIDAY PIC P: Snowy Valentine (Petersen)
J 745.59 R: All New Crafts for Valentine’s Day

Surely it’s much better to give all the books on a specific topic call numbers that are consistent and accurate and allow patrons to search successfully in the catalog, as well as see a logic in the way that the books are displayed on the shelves.

Thinking beyond Genre-fication of Fiction

We were convinced we had done the right thing when we rearranged the fiction in our middle-grades fiction collection. However, we were still concerned about young readers of all ages struggling to find nonfiction of interest to them. We started looking at systems, other than DDC, for organizing books, including nonfiction.

BISAC

BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communications) are subject headings published by the Book Industry Study Group; this is the system used in bookstores as a shelving system. It is an alphabetical listing of topics that is a lot more detailed than casual observers might imagine from looking at a bookstore arrangement (Book Industry Study Group 2012a, 2012b). A number of (mostly) public libraries are using some version of BISAC with these expanded topics.

BISAC works well because using words makes it easily understandable. For example, the BISAC “call number” for cats is "ANIMALS CATS." The order is clear in that it is alphabetical. However, because of space constraints we needed something that would work as a linear arrangement, and BISAC does not keep similar topics or related topics together; "adventure" is next to “animals” is next to “art,” etc. Therefore, we decided BISAC wasn’t what we were looking for.
C3 (Customer Centered Classification)
The C3 system was created by Markham Public Library (Ontario, Canada) as part of a major merchandising outreach program. This system uses broad categories such as Lifestyle and Family. All books are color-coded, and signage is important.

A category becomes a two-letter code, which is then combined with a four-digit numerical code from a pre-assigned range (Markham PL 2009, 2011). For example, the call number for a book about cats is "LF 1910 AUT." (The "AUT" represents the first three letters of the author’s surname.)

Like BISAC, this is a system where children come second, following on the heels of the adult system. However, we were really interested in the way that C3 focused on creating a library that people would enjoy using.

WordThink
Rangeview Public Library District (Colorado) developed the WordThink system, an adaptation of BISAC (Rangeview 2013). Like Markham, they focused on outreach to users, and their collection is arranged and displayed in inviting, user-friendly ways.

For nonfiction about cats, their call number for a children’s book is “J PETS CATS” or “E PETS CATS.” (They have dropped the author information for nonfiction.)

WordThink, in its use of BISAC’s alphabetical ordering of subjects, was problematic for our library with its space constraints. We needed to figure out an order for our main classes or categories that would work with strictly linear shelving, without the luxury of shelving islands where different categories could be grouped.

Darien Library’s System
The children’s department in the Darien (CT) Library focused their rearrangement on children ages 0–5 years. The staff there described it as an intuitive arrangement for pre-readers. In the Darien “First Five” collection, nine major categories or sections are used; each has a color associated with it. In the case of fiction, that color is reflected in a colored spine label that contains the first letter of the author’s last name (Caserotti 2009). For example, Growing Up includes books about the body, feelings, families, nutrition, and going to school—all issues related to children’s experiences of themselves and their immediate world. At Darien the user is very much at the center of the system.

For kids’ nonfiction Darien used the same large categories, but kept the Dewey numbers. Thus, a fiction book about cats would have the call number “F5 Nature AUTHOR,” and a nonfiction book about cats would have the call number “F5 NATURE 599 AUTHOR.”

We were inspired by Darien’s approach and wanted to emulate their user-centered focus. However, because our students are in grades Pre-K–5, our youngest students are about the same age as the oldest children for whom the Darien “First Five” system was devised; we needed to create something different.

Developing the Metis System
Our goal was to create a system that is flexible, child-friendly, browsable, as well as searchable. Our system, Metis (<http://metisinnovations.com>), puts like topics together and creates what we like to call orchestrated luck. This “luck” increases patrons’ chances of finding books that they didn’t know they would want but are happy to have found. An example of orchestrated luck at work is the case of the teacher who recently came in for Really Spring by Gene Zion (which she has used for years) and also walked out with And Then It’s Spring by Julie Fogliano. This experience was not likely to happen with Dewey.

We had three core ideas regarding Metis. It needed to be visual. We needed to remove barriers, and it had to be user-centered.

Our goal was to create a system that is flexible, child-friendly, browsable, as well as searchable.

We had three core ideas regarding Metis. It needed to be visual. We needed to remove barriers, and it had to be user-centered.
Metis vs. Dewey

Dewey is about classifying. The hierarchy a young child has to figure out to find truck books is beyond their level of development. Really, they just memorize the shelf the truck books are on in the school library.

Metis is about categorizing. This focus allows the system to be flexible, adapting to different ages and collection needs. For our youngest users, we’ve even stripped out the minimal hierarchy we do have so that they can easily find what they’re looking for. Older students are ready for more hierarchy; they think less concretely and more systematically. Because of this capability in older students we added detailed subcategories where necessary. For example, Mystery now contains such subtopics as Codes, Crime, Spies, Puzzles, and Unexplained. Making Stuff is another example; it contains anything that kids might want to do for fun when making, doing, or collecting: Magic Tricks, Drawing, Cooking, Origami, Putting on Plays. Metis call numbers for the youngest students (for example, “F CATS”) are simpler and shorter than those for older students (for example, “F PETS CATS”).

For middle-grade fiction we created a system that is flexible and allows for different solutions. We divided fiction according to genre and placed most of those genres in a main fiction category. Some of the books (Animals, Sports, Humor, Mystery, Adventure, and Scary) were placed at the end of other main categories. This arrangement allows for the best of both worlds: chapter books in a genre are kept together, but nonfiction and fiction in those areas are kept next to each other.

This is what a Metis fiction call number looks like: “X FANTASY ROWLING.”

Metis and AASL’s Standards

Metis helps students develop the skills we believe they need in the future, including those outlined in AASL’s Standards for the 21st-Century Learner:

“1. Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.”

• “1.1.4: Find, evaluate, and select appropriate sources to answer questions” (AASL 2007, 4). A child using Metis can easily navigate the resources available, finding more books and information to compare and evaluate. Metis makes it possible for the child to find historical fiction, narrative nonfiction, and traditional information books quickly and all in one place. The child is forced to think critically about the sources (to distinguish between fiction and nonfiction) before even taking a book off the shelf.

• “1.1.7: Make sense of information gathered from diverse sources by identifying misconceptions, main and supporting ideas, conflicting information, and point of view or bias” (AASL 2007, 4). Having a variety of books on a topic in one location makes it easy for students to think critically about the sources.

Our main question as we determined what books to put where was: “Where would our users look first for this book?”

read the whole word on those skinny books. The colors of dots and stars were selected so that people with any of the four types of color–blindness would be able to differentiate between fiction and nonfiction.

We wanted to put books in alphabetical order, which is taught to children at a young age. We also wanted to lessen the hierarchy and created twenty-six categories instead of Dewey’s ten. We wanted a flow to the shelves, such as animals being next to pets. To achieve these goals, we used a letter of the alphabet for each main category, so that “D Nature” was followed by “E Animals” and “F Pets.”

Our main question as we determined what books to put where was: “Where would our users look first for this book?” But what we discovered we were really asking was: “Where can I put this book that would maximize its chance of being found by likely users?” This type of questioning led us to put fiction and nonfiction together.

Publishers have been blurring the lines between straight nonfiction and fiction texts for years. As more and more of these hybrids come into the library it makes less and less sense for us to separate them. That separation is often confusing to children, who are still concrete in their thinking. By putting the fiction and nonfiction books together we have the opportunity to talk to our students about fact vs. fiction and teach them to think critically, a skill they need now more than ever as they hop on the Internet and quickly look for answers. Children find information in a variety of places, and we need to teach them to question what they learn and how to verify those facts in trusted sources.
Metis and the CCSS

Not surprisingly, Metis is a natural fit for schools adopting the Common Core State Standards. CCSS “will require students to demonstrate independence and perseverance; to construct arguments, and comprehend, critique, and support with evidence; and to use resources, strategies, and tools to demonstrate strong content knowledge” (Albanese 2013). Because of the emphasis CCSS places on nonfiction, primary source documents, research, and inquiry, school librarians have the opportunity to demonstrate what we’ve been doing for years. Metis makes it easier to showcase our skills.

Conclusion

Education has changed, evolving from rote learning to today’s active, constructivist, and progressive models. “Library” class is one of the few places where students have been taught the same things in the same way for over one hundred years. DDC as the main subject remained untouched, even though we’ve changed the way we teach math, reading, and almost every other subject! We want to instill in our children so many skills and habits that we believe will propel them to succeed as students and professionals. We must break down the barriers that children face in school libraries and make them library experts on a simple level. When a system is easy to understand, as Metis is, students learn how to categorize topics and navigate the system; this ability to categorize is an invaluable skill that they will apply to countless future situations.

Students also become our strongest advocates who can demonstrate why the school library is vital to the development of themselves as readers, as information gathers and, most importantly, as critical thinkers.

Tali Balas Kaplan is currently the middle school literacy resident at Success Academy Charter School in New York, NY. She is an active member of ALA and AASL and most recently served as the fiscal officer for ALSC. Tali co-authored “Are Dewey’s Day Numbered?” in School Library Journal.

Sue Giffard is the librarian for grades 3–5 at the Ethical Culture School in New York City. She is a member of ALA, ALSC, and AASL and reviews regularly for School Library Journal.

Jennifer Still-Schiff is a librarian at Ethical Culture School, focusing on media literacy and promoting audiobooks.

Andrea K. Dolloff has been the assistant librarian at the Ethical Culture School for the past twelve years and this year is the head librarian for grades Pre-K–2.
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Recommended Reading:


One Common Challenge—Two Different Solutions

Stories from Two School Libraries

Judi Moreillon with Jana Hunt and Colleen Graves
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“No subject of study is more important than reading…All other intellectual powers depend on it.”
—attributed to Jacques Barzun
Reading is a foundational tool for successful learning in and outside of school. At the middle and high school levels, educators are keenly aware of the consequences to the lifelong learning prospects of students who are not proficient readers or who simply choose not to read and develop their comprehension skills. The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2012 report by ACT found that only 52 percent of high school graduates met the reading benchmark. While this percentage has remained steady from 2010 to 2012 and is down from 53 percent in 2008 and 2009, students, educators, parents, and decision makers should not be satisfied with this level of proficiency. Even if students are not pursuing post-secondary education, they must be proficient readers to contribute to the workforce and to civic and political life.

What does this circumstance mean for school librarians? School librarians are concerned about students’ physical and intellectual access to ideas and information. We know that the school library with its wide range of print and online resources can be a treasure trove of opportunity for youth. By providing access to reading materials in a variety of formats and genres, school librarians hope to entice reluctant readers to take full advantage of the library’s treasures. Through coteaching reading comprehension strategies with classroom teachers, we hope to improve the reading proficiency of striving readers who can also benefit from increasing their use of library materials during curriculum-based and personal interest inquiry projects. Reading is central to the school library’s mission.

For the past sixteen years, the International Reading Association has been conducting an annual survey of literacy leaders. In the “What’s Hot, What’s Not” literacy survey for 2013, 75 percent of respondents said adolescent literacy and comprehension were “very hot.” One hundred percent were in agreement that both topics should be hot issues in teaching and learning (Cassidy and Grote-Garcia 2012, 10). The sociocultural context of reading at the secondary level requires students to be proficient independent readers. For example, students are often assigned reading as homework. This can involve their reading difficult texts while isolated from the support of their peers and teachers.

Traditionally, school librarians have had two main strategies for impacting the literacy development of students in their schools. One way is through reading promotion efforts: book talks, book displays, or online book trailers, and literacy events such as book fairs, contests, and reading incentive programs. The other way has been through teaching or coteaching reading comprehension and information literacy skills through standalone or collaborative lessons and units of study.

Today, school librarians are considering other strategies to address the challenges associated with adolescent literacy. One of those strategies is to genrefy the fiction section of the school library. Rather than shelving all fiction by the author’s last name, this organization scheme—with the goal of increasing students’ easy access to books—involves reorganizing the library based on the book’s genre. Another strategy is re-visionsing the library as an “Information Commons” (Harland 2011).

In the stories that follow, two Texas middle school librarians Jana Hunt and Colleen Graves
share their solutions for rising to meet this challenge. I interviewed each librarian and developed the following vignettes for this article. Jana and Colleen provided the illustrations and approved this article.

Wedgwood Middle School Story

Jana Hunt, veteran librarian at Wedgwood Middle School in Fort Worth Independent School District (ISD), was worried. She was very familiar with the reading scores for her school that showed students were not achieving grade-level benchmarks in reading. With more than eight hundred students, three-quarters of whom were receiving free or reduced lunch, Jana’s principal and faculty were focused on improving students’ proficiency in reading. During her annual library orientation sessions, Jana noted 75 percent of students struggled to conduct author searches, even after instruction. She often heard students ask as they came through the library door, “Where are the scary books?”

In spring 2011, after hearing a genre-fiction presentation by Texas librarian colleague Tammi Burns, Jana decided to genrefy the fiction section of the Wedgwood Library using the NoveList genre classification scheme. Her goal was for the library program to be an integral part of improving reading proficiency by stimulating more reluctant and striving readers to read more and use the resources of the school library more effectively.

With the help of fifteen student aides and fifteen to twenty student book club members, Jana and her crew completed the entire process in three weeks. The school library was closed only when all the books were taken off the shelves, just three days. A science teacher volunteered to bring students to the library to help. The principal and the English language arts teachers were thrilled that the library would be fully operational for most of the process.

The crew placed genre labels on the spines of all of the fiction books. When books could be categorized in more than one genre, students read reviews, book jackets, and entire books to make the genre determination. In the catalog, team members edited the call numbers for each book to include the genre designation. All former “story collection” books were moved into appropriate genres. Then the labeled books were placed in genre sections on the library shelves. The crew made student-friendly signage for each genre and celebrated their achievement.

Since genre-fying the fiction section of her school library, Jana reports that students are lined up outside the library doors every morning. She has noticed how excited the new seventh-grade students are at orientation. They find the genre organization “sticky” and decidedly different from their elementary school library experiences. Jana continues to provide book talks but makes a special effort to base each talk on a specific genre. After her talks, students rush to the shelves and put pressure on their teachers to decide who will be the first to check out these titles. Jana also notes that, after these class and book club book talks, students are using the online catalog to look for other books in that genre or written by the authors she spotlights. In addition, Jana continues to create and link book trailers that further promote these books.

Here are some quotes from Wedgwood faculty:

“Having the fiction books divided by genre helps students to easily locate books that
interest them. The system is very user friendly!”—Donna Harrison, seventh- and eighth-grade English language arts and reading teacher

“It is so much easier to assist students in locating books using the genre-based organized library vs. the old setup.”—Allison Hamrick, seventh-grade English language arts and reading teacher

“Since genre-fying the library we have seen a dramatic increase in students wanting to check out books. I believe organizing by genres gives students some focus in the library in terms of how to find the genre they are interested in. Providing this focus has increased the number of students with books in their hands reading outside of school. There is nothing like seeing a line of over fifty students every morning beating down the doors to get into the library!!!!”

T. J. Jarchow, principal

Clearly, Jana Hunt has the support of her principal and staff for genre-fying the fiction section of the library. Students are engaged; colleagues are supportive. Jana believes genre-fying helped her reach out to students and made the resources of the library accessible and attractive, particularly for reluctant readers. In fact, Jana reported Wedgwood’s library circulation soared from 7,569 items in 2011–2012 to 16,024 items in 2012–2013. Still, I wondered why she doesn’t genre fy the informational books in her collection so I asked, and Jana confided, “The librarian in me still loves Dewey.”

Note: Wedgwood is a feeder school for high schools with libraries that continue to use the Dewey classification system exclusively.

Lamar Middle School Story

In fall 2012 Colleen Graves was the new librarian at Lamar Middle School Library in Lewisville ISD. Hired just before she completed her library degree, Colleen was anxious to get her career off to a successful start. When Colleen toured the school library during her job interview, Leigh Ann Lewis, her soon-to-be principal, noted that the library resources were underutilized. Colleen shared her vision for the library and expressed her commitment to putting into action what she had learned from reading The Learning Commons: Seven Simple Steps to Transform Your Library (Harland 2011). Colleen was hired on the spot.

That summer Colleen prepared to serve the needs of eight hundred ethnically diverse middle-income students. She noted that, upon entering the school library, the Lamar learning community’s first impression was of musty reference materials, including out-of-date sets of encyclopedias. In fact, many books on the library shelves had outlived their usefulness. In addition, the library space did not flow. Committed to her vision and her promise to her principal, Colleen personally moved every book and deselected many titles as she reorganized the school library collection and reconfigured the library space.

Colleen moved the fiction books to greater prominence in the library. Like Jana, Colleen understands students’ need to quickly and effectively browse. She developed a “showcase” bookshelf where new books are displayed, covers facing out. Colleen’s goal for the showcase was to help reluctant readers quickly locate the newest books in the collection from a small selection of titles. She has achieved her goal. This collection within the collection also allows student aides to easily keep these shelves replenished.

While she did not genre-fy the entire library, she did decide to showcase books in popular genres by displaying the books together, many with the front covers visible. (Spine
labeling on Lamar library materials conforms to the district’s Dewey standard.)

She also moved shelves and furniture to create reading nooks and relocated computers that had been spread throughout the library. Colleen set up a lab at the back of the school library space where a screen and digital projector could also be located. Moving shelves and furniture opened up a new study space at the front of the library; Colleen installed café seating there to attract students. She topped off the library re-visioning with fresh paint and decals in geometric shapes to add color and pizzazz to the room.

When the school year began, everyone began flocking to the school library to check out the changes—and the books! As word spread throughout the learning community, library usage soared.

As many as eighty students now come to the library every morning before school to read, study, use the computers, chat with friends, and check out books. Colleen noticed a student who came every day but never touched a book. Her theory is, "If they sit in the Learning Commons long enough, they are bound to pick up a book!" And by the end of the year, that student did. In fact, at the end of her first year, Colleen reports that the Lamar circulation increased by 34 percent compared with the previous year’s stats.

Students are not the only stakeholders who have responded positively to the changes in the library. Teachers are also using the resources of the library and collaborating more, and the principal is pleased with the results:

"My ESL students have really enjoyed coming to the library this year. Even my reluctant readers have shown an enthusiasm for checking out books and actually reading them! I definitely attribute this to the inviting, relaxed atmosphere that you [Colleen] have created in the library this year. Thanks so much for all of your effort in this great transformation!"—Kelly Baxter, teacher

"The library gives them [GATE students] a place where they feel welcome and comfortable to collaborate and actively engage in their learning."—Phyllis Robertson, gifted and talented education (GATE) teacher

Principal Lewis noted, “Our goal was to transform the library into a digital hub and knowledge center for our students. We changed the traditional library setting into an eclectic 21st-century learning environment that our students would flock to for creative and innovative ideas.”

Note: Lamar Middle School students will matriculate at a high school with a genre-fied fiction collection; that library is also in the process of developing a learning commons model.

How Will You Respond to This Challenge?

Practitioners in the school library field must continually demonstrate to school administrators, classroom colleagues, students, parents and caregivers, and the public at large that their daily practice results in improved student learning. School librarians realize that everyone is “from Missouri” and needs to be shown that school library resources make a difference. Regardless of the strategy you choose, to the right are ten questions to ask yourself and discuss with your principal and colleagues as you rise to meet
the challenge of engaging students, particularly reluctant readers, with library resources.

Perhaps there is no “one-size-fits-all” organization scheme for 21st-century school libraries. In the near future the topic of this conversation may be a moot point, and we will be facilitating the use of library resources like those described by the TeachThought blog staff in an April 2013 post. Libraries could use "RFID [radio frequency identification] or near-field communications systems, tiny chips inside the spines of books that communicate with smartphone apps, e-reader tablets or special book-finding devices available at the front desk. Not only would it feel more familiar to students raised on digital tech, but imagine scanning rows of stacks with an augmented reality viewfinder, looking through the screen instead of at the shelves, hunting for a book that lights up when you’ve found it.”

How cool is that? Still, as long as we have physical objects in our library collections we must have some way to organize and locate them. We all hope the day will come when all children and youth have efficient and effective access to print and electronic resources—resources designed to engage them in reading and involve them in school library learning spaces.

ask yourself…

1. On what data are you basing these innovations?
2. What are your strategies for ensuring support from all library stakeholders?
3. How will you get others involved and make sure they have ownership in the process?
4. What has been the response from the administration and faculty to the idea of making these changes in the organization of the library and its resources?
5. Would a pilot project or intermediary step be a way to test the effectiveness of the changes you are proposing?
6. What kinds of library organization schemes will students experience as they advance through the instructional levels in your school district and in post-secondary education?
7. How will you align the organization schemes of both print and electronic resources in the library collection?
8. What kinds of human resources do you have at your disposal to help you make the desired changes to the collection and physical environment of the library?
9. What are the financial resources you will need to achieve these goals?
10. How will you measure whether your innovations are successful?

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is assistant professor at Texas Woman’s University in Denton. She serves as the chair of the Knowledge Quest editorial board and is also a member of the AASL Publications Advisory Group and Common Core Implementation Assistance Task Force. She and Teresa Starrett were awarded the 2013 AASL Research Grant. Judi authored Coteaching Reading Comprehension Strategies in Elementary School Libraries: Maximizing Your Impact (ALA 2013), Coteaching Reading Comprehension Strategies in Secondary School Libraries: Maximizing Your Impact (ALA 2012), and Ready and Waiting for You! (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers 2013). With Susan Ballard, Judi coedited Best of KQ: Instructional Partnerships (AASL 2013).
Our Concerns

A guidance counselor came to me with a furrowed brow. For the school’s Gay-Straight Alliance, she was looking for books on sexuality. “Did you know what’s on the shelf next to the books about homosexuality?” she asked. I’ll admit; I didn’t know. The books about homosexuality (306.76) were next to slavery (306.3) and incest (306.877). In the high...
Why Have the Kids in the Shelves When They Could Be in the Books?

school library, the field of social sciences was thin among the 300s; as a result, some very sensitive topics were being placed alongside each other. Her point, however, was a good one; what did we imply having books about incest and slavery next to homosexuality?

A sawdust-covered shop teacher wandered into the school library. He was looking for books on technology, which are the 600s, but also make appearances in the 300s and 500s. "Why were they spread all over the library?" he asked. A twenty-five-year classroom veteran, his point was a good one; how likely were kids to look in multiple places for books, no matter how good the cataloging was?

An English teacher has brought her classes into the school library to work on mythology and folklore projects for many years. Like the shop teacher, she complained that mythology books were kept in the 200s (nonfiction, oversized, and reference), folklore was around the corner in the 390s, and the Iliad and Odyssey were in the 800s with epic poetry. She was adamant that the kids not spend time looking for the books and insisted I put them on a cart for students’ use. Like the shop teacher, she was looking for a one-stop shopping solution. Hers was also a good point: Why have the kids in the shelves when they could be in the books?

Our Solution

Any classification scheme has idiosyncrasies, but what we found at Oakmont was that the school library collection was disjointed from our teaching. Dewey’s decimals don’t reflect the 21st-century interdisciplinary connections our teachers are making in the classroom, yet even a revised classification scheme would be relevant only to Oakmont. But that’s OK. A local, rather than universal, solution to the Dewey dilemma works for us for two reasons.

First, our system seeks to mirror instructional practices at Oakmont. The major divisions of our collection will be drawn around academic departments and then topically according to course offerings. Rather than decimals, colors and whole words like "oceanography" and "geology" will show students relationships between concepts. Students writing an essay on the Battle of Gettysburg would find the book with a blue label to indicate "U.S. History" and the words “Civil War” replacing "973.7," and filed alphabetically by title. Whereas 973.7 is obscure to students, finding relevant information by topics and whole words based on curricular frameworks represents an exercise in higher-order thinking.

Second, this scheme allows flexibility in handling sensitive topics, such as the Holocaust and health-related issues, at the direction of teachers, the subject experts. Understanding the curricular context helps place books in the school library collection. Returning to the 306 example, "relationships" that fall in the health section will now be distinct from “disorders” in the psychology section. Given the broad use of Holocaust materials in studying history and human rights, these materials will now be treated as other genocide–related materials. While this approach is not unlike Dewey’s subsection classification scheme, ours allows for curriculum–driven collection organization.

Yes, this recategorization project has drawbacks. First, it represents a great deal of work for a system that is similar to Dewey; after all, blue "Civil War" is not all that dissimilar from 973.7 on a spine label. Second, idiosyncrasies like the 306 problem will also creep into the Spartan system, but our hope is for a flexible system that allows for easy changes in classification and placement. All of this represents a great amount of work not yet funded by the community, but waiting for funding has allowed more interdepartmental dialog.

Our Goal

The counselor, shop teacher, and English teacher will be pleased with the new organization of the David A. Nims Library at ORHS. Dewey is a 19th–century system trying to fit into 21st–century learning and, as the 306 example shows, with some disturbing results. Teaching Dewey to high school students prepares them only for use of public libraries and not collegiate libraries that use the Library of Congress Classification. Our goal is to link what’s done in the school library more closely to what’s done in the classroom by stressing conceptual relationships and leaving the decimals in the good hands of our math teachers. Together, we will create a new informational ecosystem for our students.

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Is It Truly a Matter of “Dewey or Don’t We”?  

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To some, discussing the demise of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system is tantamount to blasphemy, while to others it is a discussion long overdue (no pun intended). I have been asked, as an educator of librarians, to present my thoughts on the issue. My conclusions are based not on thorough, scientifically sound research but rather on discussions I’ve had with my students and with building-level school librarians. What I have discovered is that both the pro- and anti-DDC perspectives use the same reasons for their arguments, namely: easier to keep the collection organized, better information retrieval, and (perhaps most importantly) integrates well with the Common Core State Standards requirements. Additionally, detractors say that DDC is unnecessary in today’s school library collections that consist mostly of electronic resources.

Those who argue against DDC cite the following issues:

1. DDC does not do well in organizing fiction collections. This is true, but it is unreasonable to blame DDC for a problem it was never designed to address in the first place: that of arranging popular fiction. For a long time fiction has been organized alphabetically by author. This arrangement does not meet students’ needs. However, that reality is not the fault of DDC, and there is no reason why all fiction should be lumped together and arranged alphabetically by author just because the DDC system has no number for it. Models of organizing fiction by genre, series, and reading levels are effective and work well with the way children (or even adults) look for fiction. I fully agree with this approach but repeat that it is an unfair criticism of DDC to say it does not deal well with fiction.

What I have discovered is that both the pro- and anti-DDC perspectives use the same reasons for their arguments.
When teaching DDC, I tell my students to pick up the item and think, “If I were going to use this item in a class in school, which class would I be going to?” even if we are not talking about many shelves.

An argument for the bookstore or genre model is that signs can be used to lead the user to the right information. This statement is made as if the use of signs is forbidden with collections organized by DDC—a totally false accusation.

3. Electronic resources do not require a place on a shelf; therefore, classification numbers are irrelevant.

In 1999 the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS) Subcommittee on Metadata and Subject Analysis submitted a report, “Subject Data in the Metadata Record: Recommendations and Rationale.” One conclusion was that not only is classification still important, but, in fact, it is more important than ever before. The authors of the report asserted that classification of Web resources can provide pathfinders to hierarchically linked resources and should be included in metadata records.

4. DDC does not meet curricular and Common Core State Standards requirements because it does not align with school subjects.

On the contrary, I submit that Dewey created an organizational model based on disciplines of study that operates in nearly perfect harmony with school curricula. Science, technology, history, social sciences, the arts, and literature are all standard elements of the school curriculum. So, too, are those subject areas articulated in DDC. When teaching DDC, I tell my students to pick up the item and think, “If I were going to use this item in a class in school, which class would I be going to?” The numbers fit the curriculum needs and, when used with good signage, can be understood by even the youngest of our students.

As stated above, I think the bookstore/genre models are great for fiction. Librarians who have made the genre switch for their fiction collections are thrilled with the results. However, in my humble opinion, for information books and other resources: keep the Dewey.

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Work Cited:

2. Numbers are difficult to understand and intimidating to the user, thus hindering information retrieval.

I was recently in the library of a middle school and examined the section for U.S. history (973). I found the library used the number 973 as a general classification; however, some books had longer numbers: 973.3 for the American Revolution and 973.7 for the Civil War. This usage made perfect sense to me. Those two time periods are highlighted in that school’s curriculum. The hierarchical and relational construction of the system could not have been exemplified any more clearly than on those shelves with the broad number first and the two specialized numbers following, thus lending itself so perfectly to the information needs of children who are looking for American Revolution and Civil War books.

Indeed, in this collection, books that in other libraries would have had longer numbers (for example, 973.9 for U.S. 20th-century history) have the whole number 973 because those other areas are not emphasized in the curriculum in that middle school. This example displays the flexibility of DDC to meet the needs of the users. The 973 number is also used to separate the history of the United States from that of other countries, for example France (944) or Italy (945).

Neither bookstore nor genre models allow for relational or hierarchical organization. Under those models we have a single category for U.S. history, or, worse, a catch-all category for history in general. This flat organization is, in my opinion, a hindrance to research needs. It works fine for browsing, but if information is needed quickly the need to go from shelf to shelf, depending on spine titles to identify the right book, is too frustrating—
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Introduction
This title sounds a bit melodramatic, but a throwdown adequately describes what took place in the school libraries in the St. Vrain Valley (CO) School District when the newest elementary school, Red Hawk, opened its doors. At Red Hawk we asked and answered the question “Is the Dewey Decimal Classification system still the best way for students to locate the information they seek?”

According to Law Four of Ranganathan’s Five Laws of Library Science, libraries are to “save the time of the reader” (2006). Libraries that use a word-based system do just that. According to Dr. R. K. Bhatt, “Libraries must have the objective of saving the time of the reader. The entire journey of librarianship is about devising, designing, and developing methods, systems of organization and dissemination of information to provide the best service to their readers in the most efficient, accurate, and effective manner and thus saving the reader’s time” (2011). In addition to saving the time of the reader, a word-based system also saves the time of the school librarian.

Background
The Dewey Decimal Classification system has been in use since 1876. The majority of school libraries use it, and, until recently, school librarians have not questioned its validity and purposeful use in a public school library setting. The St. Vrain Valley School District (SVVSD) did question its use and took a chance to make a difference in the lives of students; the results were astounding.

In 2009 Rangeview Library District in Colorado was rebranded as Anythink Public Libraries. Part of this rebranding included moving from the Dewey Decimal Classification system to a subject- and genre-based classification scheme. Anythink’s system is based on BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communications) Subject Headings as published by the Book Industry Study Group.

A visit to one of the branches coincided with the initial planning for the library in our newest elementary school, Red Hawk Elementary. This school’s collection had to be based on the traditional SVVSD curriculum and the Core Knowledge curriculum (see <www.coreknowledge.org>). A dual-curriculum school created a level of complexity not experienced previously. I was a firmly entrenched member of the Dewey camp. Before this visit to Anythink, any other option was considered treading on that most sacred of library grounds, the Dewey Decimal Classification system. Leaving it behind had never been considered an option.

What changed? A tour of the picture book section at Anythink’s Wright Farms branch revealed books grouped by subject (genre). Some examples were animals, transportation, and dinosaurs. In a traditional elementary school library in SVVSD, books are organized by the author’s surname. How many five-year-olds know the name of an author other than Dr. Seuss? They know they want a book about dinosaurs or puppies. These youngest of library users are wholly dependent on an adult such as a parent or school librarian to guide them to the books that will answer their informational needs. Using a subject-based classification system starting with Pre-K and kindergarten students promotes connections between keyword identification in searching in print and digital resources. In this age of digital natives, making this connection between the library and the Web is crucial for success in school.

Other Considerations for Leaving DDC
A few other considerations for abandoning the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system include the students’ inability to navigate it. According to Colorado Academic Standards, decimals are not taught until the second half of fourth grade. The Dewey Decimal Classification system requires background knowledge in number sense and decimals. Students without a mastery of these mathematical concepts become easily frustrated, which leads to a degree of library anxiety and a sense of failure. The elementary school library experience should leave the student with a love of books and reading, not feelings of frustration and anxiety.

One of the biggest complaints by students and teachers alike is the difficulty in locating all the information required for personal or teacher-led research needs. This difficulty leads to incomplete assignments and gathering inaccurate information. Current students have always had the Web as an integral part of their lives; their brains are wired for keyword searching. It is not surprising that students prefer to use Google over their traditional school library. Google is fast and easy. Searching by keyword or words used in common everyday language is easily accomplished by the youngest information seekers. Using a subject-based classification system in place of DDC allows for seamless transitions between Web searching and searching in the school library for nondigital resources. A subject-based system lessens anxiety and increases independence. Such
a system also leads to students’ increased level of knowledge gained unintentionally or accidentally. This type of system encourages browsing among the stacks. In fact, the online catalog is seldom used in the schools that have converted to this system.

Uniqueness of the St. Vrain Valley School District System

A new trend for school libraries to adopt a hybrid model for library organization is emerging across the country. News of schools converting to the “Bookstore Model” seems to be splashed all over social-media sites. The use of the label “bookstore model” is inaccurate and confusing. Bookstores arrange books to generate and maximize sales; libraries do not generate sales. Most school libraries that use the bookstore model have arranged their fiction according to genre, but continue to use DDC for nonfiction materials. Some schools have changed or adjusted the MARC records in the catalog while others have not.

St. Vrain’s version is not a hybrid. The Dewey Decimal Classification system is not in use in any portion of the collection in the Red Hawk Elementary School library. Picture books are organized by “pre-genre”; fiction books are organized by genre. Nonfiction books are organized by subject. The catalog reflects this word-based system.

Once the decision was made to pilot a word-based system in place of DDC, we evaluated the BISAC and Anythink’s Wordthink system. Neither system would work for this school district since they did not address curriculum needs and categories. Working together, my cataloger and I created our version that would address these curriculum needs, in addition to categories that
would guide students and staff to be independent searchers and users of information. Cataloging is done via a ten-page spreadsheet instead of the four volumes of DDC 23.

The uniqueness of this innovative approach to library organization was noticed by district administrators who applied for and received a copyright protecting the intellectual property and documentation. This action marked only the second time in the history of the school district that this level of protection was obtained. This copyright was pursued when it became obvious other entities were interested in this work and tried to obtain access to it without the district’s knowledge or permission. Having the copyright gives SVVSD the potential to market the system to book vendors and other school districts. Currently, Mackin Educational Resources has access to the system for cataloging purposes as Mackin is the only vendor who was willing to take on an innovative project of this nature.

Red Hawk Elementary Library Pilot

The pilot at Red Hawk was the first of its kind in a public elementary school library to convert an entire library and have the catalog reflect the conversion. The system was immediately embraced by students, staff, parents, and district administrators. Some of the features include:

- Separate sections for graphic novels and ready-to-read (beginning chapter books)
- Clear delineation between fiction and nonfiction titles
- Picture books organized by pre-genres; see figure 1 (A pre-genre is a designation for picture books that allows young readers to easily find books that meet their informational needs. The pre-genres help students transition to the traditional genres in the fiction section.)
- Fiction books organized by genre
- Nonfiction books organized by subject
- All “call numbers” on the spine are word based—no numbers; see figure 2
- Original signage
- OPAC computers needed only to seek a specific title; this system promotes browsing among the stacks and leads students and staff to increase their exposure to unintentional knowledge as well as more complete knowledge on a particular subject area
- A unique ten-page cataloging grid instead of DDC’s four volumes needed to catalog

Red Hawk Elementary Library Statistics

Another unique feature of this pilot is the statistical data gathered. In anticipation of the potential impact of this project on the school library community, I collected baseline checkout statistical data on my test group, the students enrolled in the Erie feeder system in fourth grade in the 2010–2011 school year. At the time, this feeder system consisted of two schools: Erie Elementary and Black Rock Elementary. The test group included approximately 270 students. I followed these same students as fifth-graders when Red Hawk Elementary opened its library with the BCS (Buchter Classification System) in the 2011–2012 school year, as well as the following year when they were sixth-graders at Erie Middle School. The purpose of this data was to determine the success of the project. If this pilot did not make an impact on students’ searching and book choices, the Red Hawk library would have been converted to DDC.

Within the first six weeks, it became evident that the new system was making an impact on the Red Hawk community. I was contacted weekly by community members, neighboring school board presidents, public librarians, library school instructors, and real estate agents who wanted tours. (The real estate agents used this particular library as a selling point for houses in the area.)

This school library was making a positive impact on the students as well. After the first six weeks,
analysis of the data showed that 100 percent of the students checked out a book in a category different than they had as fourth-graders. Those students who previously checked out a book fewer than five times during the previous year were checking out a different book every week. Students who previously would read only J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter books were now checking out titles written by other fantasy authors. Students were making connections between fantasy and mythology, science fiction and science events, historical fiction and history. All of these connections were occurring without prompting from adults. Students as young as kindergarteners were able to navigate the library independently. Observations showed that students helped each other. No adult was needed. This independence helped alleviate library anxiety and created a love of the library and a love of books that did not exist previously.

Fiction and Picture Book Checkout Statistics

Eleven different fiction genres exist in the model used at Red Hawk Elementary School. Eighteen different picture book “pre-genres” exist with this model.

• Black Rock and Erie Elementary students checked out approximately the same number of books in both years in the same categories both years. Students in both feeder schools checked out the majority of books in the fantasy genre.

• Red Hawk students experienced an increase of 372 checkouts, with the highest percentage in the realistic fiction genre, but Red Hawk students also borrow books in a variety of genres.

Red Hawk students who did not check out books as fourth-graders in the feeder schools are now able to find the books of interest to them. The new model of classification and organization transformed the school library’s value to these students.

Nonfiction Checkout Statistics

The subject-based classification and word-based labels also had a significant impact on students’ reading of nonfiction:

• Erie Elementary students checked out 140 fewer nonfiction books as fifth-graders than they did as fourth-graders.

• Black Rock Elementary School students checked out 328 fewer nonfiction books as fifth-graders than they did as fourth-graders.

• In contrast, Red Hawk Elementary School students checked out 422 more nonfiction books as fifth-graders than they did as fourth-graders at Erie or Black Rock.

• Sixty-one percent of all books checked out by Red Hawk students were nonfiction. Black Rock students checked out 39 percent nonfiction, and Erie Elementary students checked out 46 percent nonfiction. Red Hawk matched the Common Core State Standards best-practice guideline for a collection (60 percent nonfiction materials).

Benefits to Students

Red Hawk students find a word-based nonfiction section easier to navigate than a section arranged by DDC. For example, if a student (or teacher) needs nonfiction resources on an environmental problem like oil spills, the searcher would need to locate materials in a Dewey library in the following categories: 363 (history of oil spills), 639 (effects on animals), 628 (how they occur), and 507 (experiments). In our modified bookstore model, all of these books are located together in the Environmental section. This collocation saves time for students, teachers, and school librarians. Educators at Red Hawk have observed the following:

• Red Hawk students are making smooth transitions between print resources and online resources.

• Red Hawk students are making connections between fiction and nonfiction materials. If they check out science fiction books, they are checking out corresponding nonfiction resources at the same time.

• These students are making smooth transitions between picture books and fiction books.

• Students as young as kindergarteners are self-directed and empowered to find resources without the need of an adult; see figure 3. This empowerment frees up the school librarian for other library-related duties.
WITHIN THE FIRST SIX WEEKS IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT THE NEW SYSTEM WAS MAKING AN IMPACT ON THE RED HAWK COMMUNITY.
• Kindergarten students prefer nonfiction materials to picture story books at a ratio of 9 to 1.

• Based on surveys and observations, 100 percent of the staff prefers this type of library to a Dewey library. Staff support of this library system is crucial for student success and growth of the library program.

• The online catalog is used only to look up specific titles. Students and staff do not need it to browse the collection.

• Shelving returned books takes a third less time than in a traditional Dewey library; the time saved by the school librarian can be devoted to activities that more directly benefit students, activities such as coteaching and collaboration with other school staff.

Benefits to the School Librarian

As stated previously, this system benefits the school librarian significantly. In this school district, all elementary libraries are staffed by only one person. As a result, during any given class period the school librarian must constantly multitask to answer students’ reference questions, check out and check in materials, help students locate materials, and assist teachers with their needs. With the St. Vrain system, students in all grades are able to navigate the library unaided, a circumstance that frees up some of the school librarian’s time. Since books are grouped by subject, having the books shelved in precise order is not as necessary as it is when using DDC; shelving takes far less time, giving the librarian more time to help students and teachers with

FIGURE 3

Some of Red Hawk’s youngest students enjoying books they found themselves.
more advanced informational needs. The school librarian also has time to work with classroom teachers on collaborative planning and coteaching.

**New District Model?**

Other schools within the district would like to use this model of library organization. Though it has not been adopted as the district model of library best practice, 20 percent of the schools in the district are working on the process of converting their libraries. The conversion process, while time-consuming, does strengthen school librarians' collection-development skills and their knowledge of genre characteristics. As a result, the librarians are better able to do readers' advisory with their school population. The conversion process has proven to be more effective than any other professional development opportunity in the past.

Red Hawk was the prototype for this innovation and was the incentive for other schools in SVVSD to evaluate their reasons for continuing use of DDC. Currently, one high school, four middle, and eight elementary school libraries are in the process of converting to the BCS. To be relevant to students in the twenty-first century, St. Vrain Valley School District libraries will continue to evaluate existing library protocols. Libraries cannot afford to do things the same way they have always been done without a valid reason for doing so.

While no victor of this throwdown has been decided, it is clear that using a genre or word-based approach is a legitimate contender.

**Additional Resources:**

- Longmont Times Call coverage of the Red Hawk Elementary School library's arrangement:
  

- Presentation about SVVSD system of arrangement:
  
  <www.slideshare.net/svvsdlibraries/using-the-bookstoremodelofclassificationin3withlinks>

- Copyright record for the St. Vrain system:
  
  <http://cocatalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?Search_Arg=buchter&Search_Code=TALL&PID=h3_PBmpg0krLhjVTfGMnh7OpZ2cj9&SEQ=20190719120751&CNT=25&HIST=1>

- Holli Buchter is district librarian for St. Vrain Valley School District in Longmont, Colorado, where she is a backbone to forty-two public school libraries. She is a leader who provides support and management to district personnel to promote success for student achievement. Recent projects include the transformation of using an adaptation of the bookstore model in an elementary school library and participating in the Summer Institute with the Library of Congress. Holli completed her MLS at Emporia State University and holds a BA in English from Shippensburg State University.

- Holli’s blog:

  <http://blogs.stvrain.k12.co.us/mediaservices>

- School Library Media article about subject arrangement schemes, including SVVSD's:


- Works Cited:


DEWEY OR DON’T WE?

ABOVE: MELVIL DEWEY
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“Dewey or don’t we?” is the question that hundreds, if not thousands, of school librarians across the country are currently asking themselves. Do we throw out what is old but trusted for new organizational systems, or do we continue using the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system and make changes and adjustments to the system to fit our individual school situations? At ALA Midwinter in January 2013 a group of colleagues and I got together to debate this very issue. The discussion was fast and furious; the crowd was large and lively, and I left the debate feeling that I had a lot more to offer the discussion than time allowed on a cool rainy day in Seattle.

I have done both formal and informal research on the Dewey Debate, and I have even read some articles on the Metis classification system (developed by librarians at the Ethical Culture School) and the BISAC system (published by the Book Industry Study Group) that seem to be the major catalysts for change. Before any major systematic change can be made, much thought and planning must occur. I was inclined to keep Dewey in my own library; as a school librarian I am part of a K–12 system. In our district we have six school libraries and six librarians. We have the same OPAC and begin teaching our system, which uses Dewey and Sears subject headings, to our students in kindergarten. Our local public library and college library also use the Dewey system.

Before the Dewey Debate at Midwinter I did a nonscientific poll of my library patrons, which included other staff members, teachers, students, and even parents, to make sure my stance on Dewey was on the right path. I also talked with the other school librarians in my district. This was by no means a scientific survey, but the results were overwhelming in favor of DDC. I polled over one hundred people, and all but two were in favor of using the Dewey system. Every person I talked with knew what the Dewey system is and how it works in a library. I think that finding alone speaks to the universality of the system.

After my nonscientific poll and the debate in Seattle, I have some statements and conclusions that have merit in this discussion; some of them I would even call profound. One of my colleagues had this to say about ditching Dewey:

I have panic attacks just thinking about doing away with the Dewey Decimal Classification system. Why would we want to completely change a system that has worked for us for years and continues to work without fail or problems? Even in kindergarten, my students start learning the basic concept and division of the books and find what they are looking for easily.

So if Dewey is not working for other libraries it might not be the system but the teaching of the system that needs to be revamped. I know as school librarians we are in a world of constant change and progression, but not everything has to change. Consistency is the key—we don’t have to jump on every newer, cooler, or hipper way of doing things.

Some of my colleagues were concerned about the patron’s ability to find a specific book, not just a genre, in any library. Most of the students I polled at the high school level also had the same concerns.
After using the OPAC to look up a particular book for research or for pleasure reading, students want to go to the shelves and find that particular item. One student library aide commented that they were in favor of keeping the Dewey system in place for many reasons with the most important to them being the ability to find any item in any library anywhere, like college for instance. They were also concerned about where we would shelve the books that could be placed in more than one genre.

Another problem I see with genre-fying the collection is the physical act of doing so. Changing to a new system would be a huge undertaking. Moving books, redoing the OPAC, replacing spine labels, and all the other chores involved would take a massive amount of time. I believe that most administrators and teaching colleagues would see this as busy work and as a distraction from our main goals as school librarians, which are to teach information-literacy skills and reduce the achievement gap in student learning and outcomes. Today when library aides and even school librarian positions are being cut, I think we can use our time more wisely, collaborating with teachers, helping implement the Common Core State Standards, and helping our students realize that information is organized and can be easily located with the correct knowledge and information about the system.

And what happens when a school librarian leaves or retires from the position? How will the new librarian handle the situation? More than likely she or he will have been trained at an NCATE- or ALA-endorsed library school and will have been taught the Dewey system to shelve and catalog items. Will the new person have to come in and re-do the re-do from Dewey to genre and back to Dewey? One person’s placement of an item in a certain genre area may or may not match someone else’s perspective on the item. Also, student bodies are fluid and constantly changing each year. One of the arguments for genre shelving is that it meets the needs of students at that particular time. But remember that the students and staff are constantly changing. Most school libraries have one (or fewer) full-time librarian. What a huge undertaking for one person!

In the past few years I have moved away from my own cataloging chores as my position has become more diverse; I must deal with technology, computer labs, curriculum, faculty, professional development, and so on. When I place orders with book jobbers today, items—regardless of whether they are books, DVDs, or other resources—are shipped to me ready to go on the shelf. Why would the busiest person in the school want to take the time to catalog every item brought into the system? If the new item is imported into the OPAC, and the spine label matches the OPAC entry, then the students will find the item they need. Less cataloging means more time for the school librarian to collaborate with teachers and students. Another idea is to add those “genre” keywords to the OPAC as new items come into the system. When a student searches the OPAC for that genre, items of interest will show up, and the student can then go to the appropriate shelf and find the books.

Today when library aides and even school librarian positions are being cut, I think we can use our time more wisely, collaborating with teachers, helping implement the Common Core State Standards, and helping our students realize that information is organized and can be easily located with the correct knowledge and information about the system.
Genre systems are not foolproof, either. How many times have you gone to a bookstore to buy a particular book but not found it where you expected it to be? After going to the genre section you thought the book would be in, you ask a clerk, who tells you it is in another genre. More often than not, even workers in the bookstore have to look up items in their database. Book stores that use genre-fied organization systems are not in the business of helping their patrons find books easily; they want customers to browse and, possibly, purchase more. In school libraries researchers need information in a timely manner. Patrons must be able to find their information quickly after using the OPAC to identify a specific item needed to finish an assignment. With flexible scheduling, students may have only minutes to locate what they need. To facilitate the process, items must be in one easily identified location, not sought in five possible categories!

Some districts have either state- or district-mandated library frameworks that clearly state that we will teach our students the Dewey Decimal Classification system. Some curriculums mandate that we will use and teach Dewey. With implementation of the Common Core State Standards, school librarians need to be more centered on curriculum, literacy, and research. Again, our patrons will need to retrieve information in a logical and timely fashion.

Dewey is the world’s most used library classification system (OCLC 2013) and is constantly changing and evolving to meet the changing knowledge in today’s world. The best solution is to adapt Dewey to fit your school’s needs. By the very definition of the Dewey system, such an adapted use is the intent. Most of us use 92 or BIO for biographies.

Some school libraries have a separate shelf for graphic novels, but they are still in Dewey order.

You don’t have to start over from the beginning and create a new system. Use other methods to highlight resources in your collection. As school librarians we have lots of tools in our toolboxes. We can create book displays, booktalk to classrooms or individual students, and use the library website to highlight books and genres. To highlight genres students are studying in class or interested in reading, we can make resource lists from OPAC information and give the lists to students and teachers. Students and staff will benefit more from personal interaction with us than they will from their librarian reshelving and recataloging the entire library.

What is wrong with going to the 568 shelf to get a dinosaur book? If that task is a problem for your students, label shelves with pictures or text. Shelf end caps are also great places to highlight what is on that shelf. Use Dewey posters, bookmarks, stuffed animals, or other items to highlight Dewey areas of interest. Make maps of your library showing the Dewey areas. Students will learn quickly where items are located. As time permits, review and revise your OPAC to ensure that all items on a topic are cataloged consistently so they can be found in a single location.

While the Dewey Decimal Classification system has its faults, it is important to remember that it functions, in part, to make items easily located by designating a specific place on the shelf. As for browsing for books, that is what the OPAC is for. Teach searching, highlight genre keywords for patrons, and don’t ignore the fact that no classification system will ever be perfect. Dewey is universal, eliminating the need to learn a new system each time students visit a different library. Use the system to your students’ advantage, adapt, change as necessary, and make displays, but don’t throw away the baby with the bath water. As for me and my library, we will “Dewey.”

Devona J. Pendergrass is the school librarian at Mountain Home High School. She is a member of the AASL Senior Project/Capstone Project task force and AASL Affiliate Assembly executive committee. She’s also an AASL Affiliate Assembly past secretary and AASL SPVR section representative to the AASL Board of Directors. Devona is the Arkansas Library Association president elect and Constitution chair, as well as the past division chair of the Arkansas Association of School Librarians. She also serves as the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media treasurer and Long Range Planning chair. She was named the AAIM School Librarian of the Year in 2005 and the Hastings Educator of the Year in 2006. She also received the AAIM Library of the Year Award in 2007, the Herb Lawrence Leadership Award in 2010, and the Mountain Home Public Schools Big Heart Award in 2012. Her blog is available at <http://devonapendergrass.org>.

Work Cited:

Recommended Reading:
Genre vs. Dewey recalls another now-obsolete dispute: VHS vs. DVD. In the inimitable words of Rev. Jesse Jackson in the 1983 Saturday Night Live skit of the same name, “The question is moot.” As part of the ALA Midwinter panel on this topic, I suggested that the genre vs. Dewey discussion was akin to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Put simply, far more pressing questions are facing our schools and libraries. Genre vs. Dewey leads us into the weeds at a time when we should be focused on forward-thinking leadership connected to digital learning and resources. And I wonder if it is easier to debate shelving policies than the ways in which school librarians must lead, teach, and support the needs of students and teachers in 21st-century schools.

Aside from some (but not all) school librarians, few care about genre vs. Dewey. In our district and others, principals, teachers, and district administrators (and many school librarians) are focused instead on more pressing matters, including new educator-evaluation processes, Common Core State Standards, mobile technologies, and digital learning content.

As one example, the exponential influx of digital content and mobile devices into schools begs for school librarians to engage in discussions and decision making about the selection, classification, management, and distribution of content ranging from e-books to open educational resources. As information professionals, we should channel our inner Dewey to lead and guide the digital shift already under way in schools. Unfortunately, it appears that many school libraries remain resolutely bound to print. I wrote about this challenge in response to the 2012 School Library Journal Technology Survey: over half of school librarians indicated that they did not have or use e-books in their school libraries, and nearly four in ten libraries did not subscribe to digital content such as information databases or online reference and encyclopedias (Ray 2012).

When these responses are compared to the Project Tomorrow Speak Up national student technology surveys from 2011 and 2012, the comparison...
reveals tensions between what students want and what school libraries might (or might not) be providing. In the 2011 survey, students were asked how they might personalize learning through the use of a mobile device at school. The number one response was to research information (72 percent for grades 9–12; 70 percent for grades 6–8; 53 percent for grades 3–5). According to the 2013 report, "From Chalkboards to Tablets: The Emergence of the K–12 Digital Learner," the number of middle and high school students with smartphones increased from about 25 percent in 2008 to 65 percent in middle school and 80 percent in high school. Middle school students with access to digital readers increased from 17 to 39 percent in just one year. Even at grade three, over 40 percent of students reported having access to a smartphone or tablet and 61 percent to a laptop computer (Project Tomorrow 2012). The Speak Up data reveals that students—whether at school or home—have both the will and the way to access rich digital content to support learning. So what are we doing about providing access to the tools and resources that students want and need?

As one of many districts attempting to find the best ways to leverage digital content to support student learning both in and beyond the library, our district, Vancouver (WA) Public Schools, is relying on school librarians to look forward. Our school librarians are engaged in district-level decision making about digital content policies, evaluation of e-books, development of shared digital reference collections, and the creation of new courses that feature digital (vs. print) resources for student learning. Our school librarians are central to new 1:1 technology implementations in our schools and the development of a comprehensive district digital citizenship program. Beyond supporting the digital shift, several of our school librarians are leading implementation and training associated with new educator–evaluation programs—training not just for school librarians, but for all teachers in the district. And one of our school librarians is part of a statewide cadre of school librarians instructing other educators about how to implement the Common Core State Standards.

In the end, I am not certain that genre vs. Dewey is about shelving. Or even about books. In the packed ALA Midwinter Conference room, what I sensed on both sides of the debate was a fear of change.

In the end, I am not certain that genre vs. Dewey is about shelving. Or even about books. In the packed ALA Midwinter Conference room, what I sensed on both sides of the debate was a fear of change. Genre vs. Dewey is as much about the uncertainty of the future of school libraries as it is about organization. Thankfully, in many libraries around our nation, school librarians are embracing change and are seeking innovative solutions to the informational and educational challenges of our time. They are engaging with important questions about student learning and the future of schools. And they are applying their leadership and organizational acumen to a dynamic digital world that sorely needs the guidance of a good librarian.

Dewey would have liked that.

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Works Cited:


Identifying a Problem

It was early March 2008, and I was only a few months from finishing my third year as an elementary school librarian. During the morning recess the school library was humming with the sounds of students. Suddenly, three students rushed in asking me to help them find a silent-reading book for class. Looking at the clock and seeing the bell was about to ring any second, I told them I could, but we'd need to look up some choices on the computer and then they would be late to class. We could find lots of choices at the next recess.

"Never mind, we'll get something in class. We can't wait."

Sound familiar? After nearly three years of watching my students’ disappointment when I told them that the best way to find a book was by using a computer, I decided enough was enough. Something had to change, especially since many students left the school library without a book because they were frustrated by the system.

It didn't matter that I had devoted numerous lessons on how to use our OPAC or shown students read-alike websites that could aid them in finding another book. Those lessons seemed to work only for the students who were avid readers who had the tenacity to find anything they wanted. The kids I was losing were the reluctant readers. These kids would read if the process of finding a book wasn't a struggle. Using the computer involved too many steps and significant frustration. If I couldn't help them right when they needed me, they typically left without a book. When I asked them why, their answer was simple. Their classrooms had mini-libraries where...
the chapter books were arranged in tubs and sorted by genre. Teachers had an efficient system in place. Memories of my own former classroom library merged with the thoughts of rearranging the school library, and an idea began to emerge.

**Researching and Planning**

What if the fiction books were shelved by genre? Bookstores and classroom libraries are arranged by genre. Why should it be harder for students to find a book in a library than it is in a bookstore? Why not take this successful model and apply it to a school library? Wouldn’t arranging by genre make it easier for students to find the books they like and then read more?

These essential questions guided my research. In 2008 not many people were talking about genre shelving, especially at the elementary level. However, the idea wasn’t as revolutionary as I thought. In a study of young adult fiction in public libraries, researchers found supporting evidence for genre shelving that dated to 1902 (Rohde, Hoey, and Chamberlain 1998). In the early 1930s the book *How to Run a Rental Library* specified the importance of dividing new fiction, detection, westerns, and adventure books on separate shelves (Conklin 1934). A study of a California junior high library showed that 88 percent of the
students found the genre system less complicated than a traditional arrangement (Briggs 1973).

With data in hand, I knew the next step at my school required the endorsement of our principal. He had just one question: “Will it be good for kids?” After hearing my reasoning and seeing the research, he gave me his blessing. By this time it was late April. Should we convert now or wait until the summer and open with the new system in the fall? Figuring I had nothing to lose and everything to gain, we took the leap with only two months of school left in the year.

**Taking Action**

**Creating Categories**

My library assistant and I identified eleven categories we would use: fantasy, science fiction, adventure/action, mystery, horror/spooky, sports, realistic, animal fiction, humor, graphics, and classics. In bookstores I had also seen romance, thrillers, and westerns, but those were more appropriate for middle and high school. In the end, we chose genres that most closely matched our collection and the age level of our students.

**Weeding and Categorizing**

The next step was to separate the books. Every book came off the shelf and was categorized immediately by genre. Any book with a genre sticker already provided the foundation for our groups. Unmarked books were set aside. Piles of books covered all the spare space we could find. We also used this opportunity to weed the collection of damaged, obsolete, or unused books. We were ruthless. There was no point in converting the school library if the shelves were packed with books nobody wanted to read. Anything that looked dated or had yellowed pages was immediately culled from the collection. The only exceptions were old Newbery Medal winners. These were saved for our classics shelf. We also identified genres in which the selection was limited and made order lists for new books.

**Labeling Books**

Then we dealt with the remaining unmarked books one by one. If neither of us had read the book, we looked at the MARC record or online reviews to find the main category for the book. Students helped too. Often they had read the book and could make a suggestion. With any books that could have dual classification, I chose the genre that dominated and best matched our collection. We originally labeled our books with commercial genre stickers on the spine. This year I shifted to a color system using a transparent colored sticker over the call number indicating the genre category. This method is less expensive than using commercial stickers, helps with reading shelves, and allows books to be genre labeled less obviously.

**Placing Categories**

After labeling, it was time to put books back on the shelves. We used bookstore merchandising display strategies for genre placement. We wanted to create a comfortable space where students would want to linger and look around the shelves.
Fantasy, our genre with the highest circulation, was located on the best frontline shelves. We deliberately positioned adjacent shelves to lure students to different, yet related, genres. For example, animal fiction was situated on one side of fantasy and adventure/action on the other. Each genre built upon the next to minimize the negative effects of low traffic areas in the library. Bright, colorful signs were added to draw the students to the books. Tiffany Whitehead, a middle school librarian in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, has created a set of Creative Commons color-coded genre signs that are available on Flickr for use by librarians <www.flickr.com/photos/49483751@N02/sets/72157631128222632>.

Updating OPAC

Genre shelving doesn’t mean disregarding computer searches. We wanted a dual system where anyone could search via the OPAC or by browsing the stacks. To keep it simple, we added a genre abbreviation to the end of the call number. For example, the book Hatchet by Gary Paulsen was given the call number “F PAU ADV,” indicating this book could be found alphabetically on the adventure shelf. Because we did a mid-year conversion and needed to work quickly, we put the books back on the shelf before we altered the call numbers in our catalog. Then after the shelves were organized, we changed the catalog records. Trained volunteers helped us complete the process by the end of the school year.

Enjoying the Results

Students loved the new system from the beginning due to its intuitive nature. Conversations about books mingled at genre sections. “It’s amazing how the kids just come right in and walk to their favorite area,” high school librarian Susan Gregerson shared in an e-mail. In the first full year of implementation, our circulations rose from 2,599 to 4,996 books per year, representing a 92 percent increase. In the same year, third- and fourth-graders meeting the standard in our state’s reading test rose by 20 percent and 24 percent respectively. By the end of our fourth year with the genre system, annual circulation had increased to 12,117 books, representing a cumulative 366 percent increase from inception.

Conversion to genre shelving doesn’t have to be all or nothing. Starting with one genre and systematically rotating through them works just as well. Whatever method you use, the results will astound you. As fifth-grade teacher Judy Higgins told me, “I don’t need a classroom library anymore. My kids can get everything they want in the library now.”

Looking ahead, I have no current plans to change the arrangement of the whole nonfiction section. (I’m concerned about the possibility of exchanging one set of problems for another.) However, I would like to increase readership of nonfiction books suitable for our youngest, newest readers. One of the items on my to-do list is to explore options for helping emerging readers easily find nonfiction tailored just for them. If I find an effective method, I’ll let you know via AASLForum!

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Visit her blog at <http://bellbulldogreaders.edublogs.org> or follow her on Twitter: @mrs_hembree.

Works Cited:
CURATING THE SHELVES

Deborah Schiano  |  debschi@gmail.com
Curation: to gather, organize, and present resources in a way that meets information needs and interests, makes sense for virtual as well as physical resources. A Northern New Jersey middle school library made the decision to curate its physical resources according to the needs of its users, and, in so doing, created a shelving system that’s, without question, a winning scenario.

Why Make It Intuitive?

It’s a school librarian’s responsibility to aggregate and organize information in a way that fits the needs of the population she supports. With a variety of easily available digital curation tools, coupled with the current information deluge, that responsibility has never been clearer or more important. My interest in student-centered arrangement and presentation of library resources began with my introduction to pathfinders; I can remember arguing their merit in library school. The nays predicated, “If students don’t learn to find and evaluate resources freely from the start, they will never learn.” The yays asserted, “The world of information has become so overloaded that, if we don’t aid students by scaffolding their investigation, they will become completely overwhelmed and resort to using inferior information resources.” By creating ways that allow users to more easily find what they’re looking for, are we empowering them or limiting their opportunity to learn a necessary skill?

Expecting students to master every skill every time is unrealistic and ineffective; on the other hand, if students acquire ineffectual practices, educators will have done them a disservice in the long run. Giving students the means to master one skill at a time not only supports deep learning required by the Common Core State Standards but is also basic to principles of constructivist learning. For example, if our learning objective is for students to master the skills associated with searching and evaluating information resources, then obviously it is not advisable for teachers to provide a collection of viable resources. However, if our learning objective is to have students compare and contrast resources on a particular topic to identify point of view or bias, and they’ve not yet had the opportunity to master the skill of searching and evaluating, then presenting them with a selection of resources makes sense.

School librarians are not only responsible for teaching students how to find resources; they’re also responsible for getting students to read, to want to read, and to make sense of what they read. If students are overwhelmed by or uninspired in the process of trying to find books, they will miss the opportunity to read them.

Inspiration and Procedure

The innovative and proactive “ditching Dewey” practices of Tamara Cox, Shannon Miller, Kristie Miller, and the librarians at the Ethical Culture Fieldstone School (see list of recommended resources) were the inspiration for our reorganizing project at Lounsberry. After the arduous process of weeding all outdated and unused titles, we had a clearer idea of what we actually owned and a better understanding of what we were missing. With this knowledge, we considered the categories already established by those who boldly treads these waters before us, our students’ interests and understandings, content-area curricula, and our physical space and then created a categorical system that works for us, now. (To see our categories, go to <www.lhvlc.com/print-resources.html>.)

A great deal of trial and error was involved in this process—to say that it was a difficult endeavor is putting it lightly! We made every shelving decision in the context of the answers to these questions: “Will this move help our students more easily find the books that they’re looking for? Will this book’s placement have the potential to encourage new interests and deeper understandings through books to which students may never have been attracted in a more traditional shelving scenario?”

We placed main category signs on the walls above the shelving and created subcategory shelf signs by sliding old-fashioned
bookends into weeded books with labeled spines. We then changed call numbers in our OPAC and on book spine labels to match the new subcategories. When ordering new books, I simply attach a note to my nonfiction titles on my vendor (Mackin) order list to customize the call number and spine label. (According to Follett, this customizing is also doable using their ordering system.) We plan to organize fiction according to genre as well, but that will be a project for next year!

What I find most interesting about the “ditching Dewey” issue is that it’s mostly school librarians who emphasize its problems. For teachers, parents, and students, our new system makes sense; they are enthusiastic about the change and even assisted in the reshelving process. Our students still use the OPAC to search; however, they have the added ability to browse.

Yes, our goal is for students to become information curators themselves: to effectively and confidently search, evaluate, and aggregate quality resources that meet their information needs. The shelving organizational system at Lounsberry not only makes finding resources easier, it also allows fifth- and sixth-grade students to witness the art of curation, exemplified in a physical and visual manner. As school librarians, we must support the need for students to learn to make sense of and create new understandings from the information that they find; if we can enable them to do so by minimizing their frustrations, we’ve fostered learning and empowered learners.

According to the Library of Congress website, to catalog the 6,487 volumes in his personal library Thomas Jefferson modified an organization of knowledge originally developed by the British philosopher Francis Bacon. Jefferson arranged his books in categories “History,” “Philosophy,” and “Fine Arts” (and forty-four subcategories). To read excerpts from examples of the titles he owned and to access lists of his books in some of the subcategories, go to <http://myloc.gov/exhibitions/jeffersonslibrary/pages/default.aspx>.

Recommended Resources:


Virtual Dewey Resources Deliver Trusted, Familiar 21st-Century Information

Tom Adamich
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Where do you go to find out the latest on how the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system is being used (and will be used) in our 21st-century virtual-knowledge world? The answer is two great websites containing

- the most current information on both Dewey and linked data at <http://dewey.info>, and

### DDC Linked Data

At the Dewey Decimal Classification/Linked Data site <http://dewey.info>, you can find a brief overview of the DDC/Linked Data project, a list of DDC’s ten main classes, and a list that highlights Dewey resources now available in linked-data form using semantic architecture and system protocols. The site also links to examples and to the main OCLC website for an overview of DDC and linked data from OCLC’s perspective.

For those who may be unfamiliar with what linked data is, it is the method of publishing structured data so that the data may be interlinked with other data to create meaningful relationships on the Web (Wikimedia Foundation 2013). Today’s search engines such as Google and Bing can access ”marked up” data using linked data’s semantic architecture (common file structures and system coding). For example, a school librarian’s name marked up using linked-data architecture may be linked to his or her faculty profile on the school website, which may also be linked to information about the school district and city where the school is located.

In dewey.info, sample subject class listings are provided. Here is an example from dewey.info: <http://dewey.info/class/641/2009-08/about.fr>. When this URL is clicked, the information shown in figure 1 is displayed.

Let’s click on ”Gestion de la vie familiale” (French for ”Management of family life”). Because all listings are marked up using linked data/semantic architecture, by clicking on one of the heading categories, the information shown in figure 2 is displayed.

All of the section headings for the Dewey division are displayed, as is the main class from which it is derived, in this case 600 Technology (expressed in French). Each section heading may also be accessed and linked back to the ”Management of family life” division.

Notice, too, that all listings identify the languages in which the DDC is available (including Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian, and others). Furthermore, a Creative Commons license for each element (enabling the content to be freely...
The availability of DDC classes and divisions in link- data form will definitely open doors for school librarians and others to use Dewey Decimal Classification in many ways both inside and outside the school library community.

used with attribution to OCLC as the creator) and repurposed (again with attribution) is included.

The availability of DDC classes and divisions in linked-data form will definitely open doors for school librarians and others to use the Dewey Decimal Classification in many ways both inside and outside the school library community (as a content classifier, a search optimization, and categorization tool).

025.431: Dewey Blog

No doubt about it—the Dewey Decimal Classification/Linked Data site is an incredibly valuable free resource. Yet another truly incredible Dewey resource is 025.431: Dewey Blog available at <http://ddc.typepad.com>. The latest Dewey news, division/section updates, commentary, and dialog are featured here—maintained by none other than DDC assistant editor Rebecca Green <http://staff.oclc.org/~dewey/rebecca.htm> and her staff of knowledgeable Dewey bloggers. Each division has its own link page with Dewey classification tips, Dewey-related news items, and other useful information.

For example, the listing for <http://ddc.typepad.com/025431/600699_technology> (as of July 9, 2013, when this was written) contained the May 27, 2013, blog post "Recipes from Restaurants," as well as the May 9, 2013, post "What If I Am Using the WebDewey Number Building Tool and Click START or ADD Then—Oops!—Regret It?"

These samplings are just the tip of the iceberg of the information this site offers us as school librarians. If you visit no other library-related websites for the rest of the day, explore both the Dewey Decimal Classification/Linked Data site and 025.431: Dewey Blog—you won’t be disappointed!

Tom Adamich is a digital asset librarian (since 2011), certified school librarian (since 2000), and a librarian since 1991. He is currently content/systems librarian and metadata program manager for Mitinet Library Services, based in Verona, a suburb of Madison, Wisconsin. Tom was a school librarian and consultant for the Indian Valley Local Schools in Ohio from 1999–2009. He is president of Visiting Librarian Service, a contract–librarian firm he has operated on a full- or part-time basis since 1993.

Work Cited:

By now you’ve probably heard of Pinterest (<www.pinterest.com>), the virtual pinboard that lets you collect and share image-based bookmarks. Because I don’t necessarily want to share my personal pins while in my professional role I’ve created a separate page for the school library using my school e-mail address. Here I gather and share teaching resources, professional development articles, and ideas for integrating technology and digital literacy into the curriculum. Kali Hudgins, English Department chair at Pamlico County High School, expressed her appreciation for our school’s page, saying “The internet is full of awesome resources, but it is so hard to sift through and categorize it all. The school’s Pinterest page has helped with that issue” (2013).

**Promotion**

To share our page with teachers, I added a WiseStamp signature extension (<www.wisestamp.com>) to my e-mail and set it up to automatically add to my e-mails images of recent pins. I also put a QR code on a Pinterest poster in the teachers’ lounge and have links to our Pinterest page on the school library’s website and in my Twitter description. These actions keep my work as a resource manager in view of the teachers and remind them to ask me when they need help finding materials and sites for their classes.

Promotion boards are ideal for promoting new books, celebrating particular genres, or sharing nonfiction titles on various subjects. Linking to book reviews on your own blog will help bring in new blog readers and make Pinterest users aware of your website.

This year, our Teen Library Council will create iMovie book trailers to post on our school library’s webpage, which we will then add to a Pinterest board. I also have a board for our periodicals. Most of the magazines to which we subscribe have a Web presence. A “Zines” board draws attention to our print subscriptions at the same time it makes the digital content more accessible.

**Collaboration**

Pinterest makes a great collaboration tool as well. I recently invited our teachers to add pins to departmental group boards. Visual arts teacher Holly Bradley said our Pinterest boards “add to the feeling of community at school when we don’t get a chance to see each other in the building” (2013). My hope is that this sense of community will help...
Signing up for Pinterest is easy. Anyone with an e-mail address can sign up. The form asks for a first and last name, but you can get creative. I named our school site “Canes Media” in honor of our mascot “The Hurricanes.”

Once you’ve signed up, Pinterest will ask you to choose a few interests so it can help you find some boards to follow. Click on topics you like and Pinterest will offer suggestions. Once you’ve chosen a few topics, you will be taken on a brief tour and introduced to your home feed, where recent pins from the boards you chose will be displayed.

Pins can be collected two ways. The first is re-pinning. When you hover over an image on your home feed, three buttons pop up. One is a “Like” button (with a heart on it), another provides the option to send the pin to someone, and the third is a “Pin It” button. To re-pin, simply click the “Pin It” button. If you’ve already set up boards, you can choose from those or create a new board. The pin will include a description from the original pinner. You can keep that description, edit it by clicking in the text box, or write your own description. Once you click “Pin It” in the pop-up window, your pin will be added to your board and shared with your followers.

The second way to collect pins is to create a pin yourself. Clicking on the plus sign at the top of the page will give you the options of uploading an image from your computer or adding a pin from a website using the URL. You can also install a bookmarklet that allows you to easily pin while browsing the Web. When you are creating a new pin from a website, Pinterest will help you by finding images from the site that are “pinnable.” Pinnable images are larger than 100x200 pixels and not embedded in an iframe (Hagan 2012). Choose the image that best reflects the content of the page. If the website contains no pinnable images, you can use a screen capture and then edit your pin to add the link.

When creating your own pin, write a description that will accompany the image. An easy way to create the description is to highlight text from the page itself before creating the pin. Pinterest will pull that text when it pulls the image. If you don’t highlight, an image often comes with its own text, but it usually describes the image, not the site as a whole. Descriptive text is searchable, so annotate well. Up to five hundred characters are allowed, but it’s best to keep descriptions simple. In the description, be sure to credit the source and link to the original owner or creator of the image. Pinterest recently updated its copyright policy to better protect its users, but pinning from the original source is the best way to avoid potential problems (Cannon 2013; Pinterest 2013).

Happy pinning!
nurture a culture of sharing and collaborating in the classroom as well as online. Inviting teachers to work together on boards gives them a reason to investigate the site and can open up new lines of communication (Taylor 2006).

Students over age thirteen can join Pinterest and contribute to boards as well. For example, you could create a group board for *Great Expectations* and have students pin images of costumes (look for the Drexel Historic Costume Collection <www.pinterest.com/DHCC>), historic gardens, household goods, and London architecture. Meanwhile, you and the teacher can add links to such sites as the Charles Dickens Museum <www.dickensfellowship.org> or to webquests you’ve created together. The board then becomes a jumping-off point for further investigation by students. Students could be asked to work in small groups and use Pinterest to cast, costume, and design a set for a scene in the book. Collecting images relevant to a literary work helps learners connect more deeply with the material (Dean et al. 2012). Students would have to justify their selections in 500-character descriptions, so they would get practice in writing succinctly.

The same process could be used for a history class, having students gather images and primary source documents from a specific time period. Asking students to re-pin only from museum or government pages would give them practice in evaluating authenticity. Students could work together to gather a wide array of image types, from transportation to advertising to music, depending on their interests.

I am working with our social studies department to expand this idea into a school–wide project documenting specific time periods in American history.

**Exploration**

A project on environmental or global issues could start on a board you’ve created with resources gathered from across the Web, or you could begin with one of the boards set up by the United Nations <www.pinterest.com/unwfp>, <www.pinterest.com/undp>, or <www.pinterest.com/unicef> or the World Resources Institute <www.pinterest.com/worldresources>. Students can explore marine biology topics via the Smithsonian’s Ocean Portal page <www.pinterest.com/OceanPortal>. I think students who are visual learners are more likely to engage in finding a research topic that interests them when they are presented with curated images linked to relevant information. They may be drawn to a topic they wouldn’t otherwise have considered.

On Pinterest, you can let students loose in the Louvre <www.pinterest.com/museedulouvre>, the Metropolitan Museum of Art <www.pinterest.com/metmuseum>, or the International Spy Museum <www.pinterest.com/intlspymuseum>. Use the search feature and select “Pinners” to find museums, government agencies, and universities that have set up Pinterest pages. Even the White House has jumped on the Pinterest bandwagon <www.pinterest.com/whitehouse>! Hint: Once you find a great pinner, check to see who that person follows. You will find some amazing boards that way. The Met is a perfect example, linking to a
variety of pages such as those curated by the Andy Warhol Museum, the Tubman African American Museum, and the Adventure Science Center.

Pinterest allows you to explore to your heart’s content, curating along the way, and creating something that is useful to your school and your learning community.

Jennifer Yount Baker is the media coordinator at Pamlico County High School, which shares a facility with the Pamlico County Public Library, where she was formerly the young adult librarian. After having waited a seeming eternity to be granted access to the beta version of Pinterest, she now pins professionally at <pinterest.com/canesmedia> and personally at <pinterest.com/jybnc>. She is also a member of AASL. You can follow Jen on Twitter: @20knotlibrarian.

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Very few people, places, things, or concepts fall neatly into a single, universally agreed-upon box. And so, we end up in the land of compromise and lowest common denominators.

How Dewey Find What We’re Really Looking For?

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So let’s say your library has an extremely realistic, free-range hologram of a very rare white Bengal tiger, complete with icy blue eyes. Where would you want it to roam? In the children’s section, near Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too? Maybe near the popular-fiction shelves, close to The Life of Pi? How about with books on religion since the tiger symbolizes power and beauty in Hinduism? Then again, you might prefer to have your tiger wander around in the geography section, near books about the Indian subcontinent. Or, since it’s a tiger (more precisely Panthera tigris tigris), you might want to see it in zoology with all the other critters.

Such is the choice that any organizer of shared information must face. Very few people, places, things, or concepts fall neatly into a single, universally agreed-upon box. And so, we end up in the land of compromise and lowest common denominators.

The tiger goes into zoology. It makes sense.

If I put the white Bengal tiger with all the other animals, I will always know where to find it, even if I am studying the four symbols of Chinese constellations and want to compare the mythological Baihu (the white tiger of the West) to the real deal in southern Asia.

That’s the decision made by Dr. Yanina Zinchenko, the fictional “most famous librarian in the world” whom I put in charge of Mr. Lemoncello’s unbelievably spectacular library (the place has hover ladders to help you retrieve books from the highest shelves) in my new book for middle-grade readers Escape from Mr. Lemoncello’s Library. The tiger is assigned a call number. But don’t worry—the children’s department gets an audio-animatronic Mother Goose that can sing along (or make rude noises) to just about any book, including Treasure Island and Walter the Farting Dog.

In writing about a fantastical library, I found myself rediscovering Melvil Dewey’s Decimal Classification system. First insight? Not many guys are named Melvil anymore.

Doing my library research, I spent a good deal of time studying those colorful charts that break down the ten Dewey categories into easy-to-grasp icons. I also learned a little about how Mr. Dewey came up with his Decimal Classification system. Apparently, he was frustrated by the way all the different libraries of his day organized their books in different ways.
I’m not a librarian (I’ve never even played one on TV), but I imagine there must be a bazillion ways to organize information. Alphabetically. By title. By author. By subject matter. By genre. By book-cover color. By popularity, which, by the way, is how they organize the books in the massive Random House warehouse I toured in Maryland—the least popular titles go way up on the tippy top of the seven-story-tall shelving units.

I hadn’t realized that Mr. Dewey decided to organize nonfiction titles into ten broad categories by asking, “What BIG question of life does the information fundamentally answer?”

He asked nearly catechismal questions like “Who am I?” (for the answer, please go to the 100s and grab a book about philosophy) and “How did we get here?” (the 200s, religion and mythology, or, for a more practical answer, check out transportation titles in the 300s).

In short, Mr. Dewey viewed the library as the place to answer all of life’s questions.

The hero of my new novel, Mr. Luigi Lemoncello, shares that same love of libraries. He sees the library as a great public institution where anyone, no matter what race, religion, or economic status, can learn anything about everything. He even has a motto for his new library: “Knowledge Not Shared Remains Unknown.”

The Dewey Decimal Classification system facilitates that knowledge sharing by making it easy to locate information by boiling it down to its essence.

A white Bengal tiger is first and foremost a tiger. An animal. Cage it in zoology.

Yes, there are other systems, but Dewey is like the “GO” space on a Monopoly board. It gives us a common starting point.

I guess that’s Dewey’s other big advantage: It caught on. People use it. Remember Esperanto, the international language we were all supposed to be speaking by now? That’s okay. Nobody else does, either.

That said, I don’t really think simply knowing how and where to find information is the Holy Grail in any quest for knowledge. It is only a tool to help you answer the EVEN BIGGER questions.

Years ago, when I was a Boy Scout, our troop went on what the leaders called a “Lost Patrol Camping Trip.” We were broken up into groups and dropped at various points in the middle of a forest. The object of the game was to find the camping site, which we knew only as a spot on a map. The first group to reach the rendezvous point won some sort of prize. Or glory. Maybe both. Our only tools were a compass and the map.

I suppose we could’ve just played a hunch and said, “It looks like it’s at the top of a hill, so let’s go climb a couple hills till we find it.” Or, we could crack the map’s code by “orienteering”—lining up our compass’s north with the map’s north, taking a bearing, and following it. But knowing those basics didn’t guarantee success.

We also needed to know how to read a topographical map and why it’s never a good idea to hike through a swamp—because the most direct route might lead straight through a boot-sucking bog. Those of us leading the Scout patrols also needed some fundamental management and first-aid skills, not to mention a passing knowledge of traditional hiking humor to boost morale. We needed information gathered from several different sources.

For the twelve 12-year-olds eager to win Mr. Lemoncello’s big prize in Escape from Mr. Lemoncello’s Library, one
way to find the secret exit is to piece together a trail of clues taken from each of the ten DDC categories. No single category gives the players a complete answer. But put all the clues together, and the answer to the book’s big riddle becomes clear.

This solution, I think, points to the enduring and fundamental strength of libraries: They offer us all the resources we need to examine every aspect of a subject under the expert guidance of trained explorers (a.k.a. librarians).

So put me down as a fan of the Dewey Decimal Classification system, but only as the first step in a more three-dimensional approach.

Because, for me, Shakespeare’s plays really come alive only when I know where to find the scripts (the 800s), plus a little about Elizabethan history, the meaning of “iambic pentameter,” what groundlings were (they paid a penny and sat on the ground), why religious folks shunned actors (the devil is the great pretender), and why every scene ends with a rhyming couplet (the plays were performed during the day, and without blackouts, the actors in the next scene needed some kind of cue to know they were on!).

No single DDC number, not even “822.33 William Shakespeare,” can tell me all that.

All ten Dewey categories, taken together, can.

And if adoption of the Common Core State Standards leads (as I’ve read it might) to this kind of 360-degree answer for all kinds of questions, I’m predicting school librarians are going to be very, very busy!

Chris Grabenstein is the author of the New York Times best-seller Escape from Mr. Lemoncello’s Library from Random House. He is also the coauthor (with James Patterson) of the #1 best-sellers I Funny and Treasure Hunters. He is the author of twenty other books for children and adults, a playwright, screenwriter, former advertising executive, and improvisational comedian. Winner of two Anthony and three Agatha Awards, Chris wrote for Jim Henson’s Muppets and cowrote the CBS TV movie The Christmas Gift starring John Denver. Chris lives in New York City with his wife, three cats, and a rescue dog named Fred who starred on Broadway in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. You can visit Chris (and Fred) at <www.ChrisGrabenstein.com>.

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Works Cited:


