The Work of a Classifier in the Dewey Section of the Library of Congress

By Mark A. Behrens, *Senior Classifier*

The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) has a long history dating back to 1876. My own history with Dewey dates back to the mid-1980s when I was a paraprofessional cataloger for St. Louis County Public Library. The 19th edition of DDC was current when I started cataloging. We are now using the 23rd edition. The basic structure has remained the same for 114 years but is dynamic enough to incorporate new subjects and disciplines. When I first started working in a library, "computer science" was classed in 001.6.   It was relocated mid-19th-edition to 004-006, and it continues to be one of the most dynamic areas for change in the classification system.

The primary duty of a Dewey classifier is production. Even though we have experienced staff losses over the past few years, we are still expected to classify in all of the disciplines, 001-999. Each of us was hired with certain areas of expertise, but now we need to be generalists. We classify two different types of material—pre-publication galleys in the Electronic Cataloging in Publication Program (ECIP) and in-scope monographs. All ECIPs must be classified. The Library of Congress typically processes 50,000 ECIPs a year. Because all titles processed in the CIP Program must have a U.S. place of publication, most of the material is in English. In-scope monographs are classified as workloads permit. Material published since 2000 in English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese is in scope for Dewey classification.

Ironically, distribution in our office is by Library of Congress classification. Each classifier has primary and backup responsibilities. My current primary classification areas are G, GA-GF, H-HJ, HS, HV, HX, J, K, Q, QA (except QA76), QB-QE, T-TP, and U-V. As a senior classifier, I have been trained to classify in all areas, which is fortunate because there are few one-to-one correlations between the LC and Dewey systems.

The principal tool we use is *WebDewey*, the online version of DDC. This is the definitive version of Dewey. The printed version of the 23rd edition is dated, even though it was published in 2011. Other online tools I regularly use are *Wikipedia* and *Ethnologue*. While dated, one other print tool that I continue to use is *People Places & Things* which was published in 2001 and is based on the 21st edition; it may be the best resource to find "built" numbers easily.

Another major responsibility Dewey Section classifiers have is to assist the editors with development. We have two assistant editors in our office, and the editor-in-chief based at OCLC headquarters in Ohio often visits our office. Other classifiers have proposed major revisions and expansions. I typically use the classification problems that arise on a normal day to find possible typographical errors, ambiguities, and dual provisions in the schedules. For a number of years I have been involved with the comparison of the current edition of *Ethnologue* to DDC Tables 5 and 6.

As an example of such development, a few weeks ago I was doing some back up work in biology, and I had two monographs on biometrics. Normally biometrics is classified at 570.15195—statistics as applied to biology—but the literature is beginning to change. I showed these two books to one of the assistant editors. She agreed that the 570 number was incorrect for these items. The literature is beginning to treat biometrics as a special computing topic, which is classed in 006. We can expect a further expansion of 006 to take place within the next few years to incorporate modern biometrics.

My final major responsibility is training, which is a requirement to become a senior classifier. Training can be one-on-one for a new hire or for another classifier who is taking on additional subject area responsibilities. We are often asked to train other catalogers at the Library in DDC. The catalogers help us in the Dewey Section by covering disciplines in which they have some subject expertise.

There is a certain joy in being a classifier in LC's Dewey Section. My co-workers are some of the most knowledgeable and professional people with which one could imagine working. The work my colleagues and I do in the Dewey Section of the Library of Congress serves libraries and users across the United States and throughout the world. I personally take great pride in the services we provide.