

Changing places: some practical outcomes from a reclassification project using DDC22

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Want to know about the practical steps involved in reclassifying an area of stock? What about some recommendations before undertaking such a task? This is the article for you as it provides answers developed from lessons learned during a real experience, in 2005, when the author completed a reclassification project during a six-month temporary contract at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design.

Introduction

In 2005 I was employed on a six-month contract by the Surrey Institute of Art and Design (SIAD). The job entailed a range of professional cataloguing and classification duties to facilitate the migration of library stock to DDC22, the twenty-second edition of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), in order to support delivery of an effective library system for staff and students at SIAD.¹

SIAD was formed in 1994 from two institutions, the West Surrey College of Art and Design and Epsom and Ewell School of Art. It subsequently became the University College for the Creative Arts in 2005 and, after a merger with Kent Institute of Art and Design, gained university status in 2008. At the time of my employment there were 3500 students and the library stock at Farnham numbered approximately 80,000 items.

Background

At the time of the temporary appointment, SIAD used the Talis library management system, in which I needed training before I began the project. The brief was to re-classify the 709.40922 range, the area for European artists, in accordance with DDC22. This whole area was to be reclassified according to the type of art and where appropriate by artist rather than by geographical area. At the time all the

European artists, regardless of the medium in which they worked, were classed together. Also within the brief was the need to look at other areas of stock, in particular advertising and graphic design, which were grouped together and needed to be separated. The primary objective was to reclassify one particular area of the collection; the secondary objectives were to weed the whole section in accordance with the library's stock withdrawal policy, and then to consult with subject librarians and academics as to the relevance of the material selected for disposal.

Methodology

There were 69 shelves of material to reclassify (about 2100 items) and to begin the process I used the library's de-selection policy in order to identify items that could be withdrawn and thus create more room on the shelves. The project was to be conducted while the library remained open, so it was necessary to inform all users about what was happening throughout the process. The project was overseen by the Bibliographic Librarian in post at that time, but otherwise all its planning, execution and completion were under my control.

My previous experience of stock reclassification had been as a school librarian, and the work had been carried out during the summer holidays. So in considering how to approach the SIAD task I

needed to take into account a number of different things: trolleys to move stock, the movement of material into new locations within the non-fiction sequence, a work area away from the users to sort items (so academics could review what was to be withdrawn in their subject area), management of time in order to complete the project within six months, methods for communicating progress to both library staff and academic staff and to the students, and finally, the disposal and removal of stock after review.

With this particular project I actually started with the smaller area of advertising and graphic design, which only involved about six shelves of books. This was a good way to practise the routine on a smaller scale and I was able to consult with my line manager frequently as this was her subject responsibility.

So, to the major task of weeding and reclassifying 69 shelves. The following processes evolved as a result of my having completed the previous smaller reclassification project. The reclassification was carried out by checking both our own and other library catalogues to find the most commonly used class marks, and also of course following the four-volume DDC22 guidelines.

It was important to withdraw material before reclassification to reduce the amount of work.

Therefore I

- went to the first bay of shelves and took off all those books that met the stock policy criteria for weeding
- took these to the work room and shelved them in Dewey order
- informed the subject librarians, who in turn asked the academics to look at them to check they were happy for them to be withdrawn
- withdrew the books from the library catalogue and checked their value before any items were disposed of
- reclassified those books which were to be kept according to DDC22, and also of course reclassified the remaining books on the shelves

Notices were displayed informing users about the project, and about the location of the books if they were not on the shelves, and encouraging them to ask if they had any queries. These notices were in some cases very detailed as at one point there were books on trolleys all round the walls of the library while the non-fiction stock was moved round to accommodate the areas that expanded as a result of reclassification. The notices included plans of the shelves and an indication of the direction of the Dewey sequence of the books on trolleys.

There were two major areas of growth as a result of the reclassification from 709.40922: these were

759 (painters) and 709.2 ('Persons: class here description, critical appraisal, biography, works of artists not limited to or chiefly identified with a specific form, e.g. painting, or group of forms, e.g. graphic arts²³). One other area which grew noticeably was 709.04074, the number for performance art.

When reclassifying books to 759 it is worth considering how to classify the artists, by country of birth or by the country they were in at the time of their death – an example is the Russian/French painter Kandinsky. The subject librarian and I decided to classify according to the country of birth. Another consideration was whether to subdivide painters from Great Britain into English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish painters. Because of the number of books involved, the British painters were subdivided.

Lessons learned

When I began this project I didn't appreciate the sheer size of the task ahead. On reflection, and also having conducted a stock check within the last two years, there are lessons to be learned. The most important of these concern

- the need for planning. It is essential to create an overall plan with month-by-month goals, and then within this a breakdown into weekly and daily targets, to ensure that the task is completed on time. It is worth building in leeway for both expected and unexpected eventualities, for example Bank Holidays, leave, training days and sickness. Time should also be allowed for regular meetings with your line manager to discuss any issues, and to report on progress and successes
- the time taken to actually decide on a class number should not be underestimated. Although I was interested in art, I had no in-depth knowledge of the arts and I learnt much of this as I was reclassifying the books
- deciding who else is to be involved in the project on a regular basis, for example IT or other library staff
- budget considerations: for example a supply of sticky labels will be needed; are there enough trolleys; does a sack trolley need to be purchased for moving boxes of books
- training needs: find out what these are likely to be and build them into the project
- the sheer physicality of moving stock. Although it is obvious that stock will need to be moved, it is physically demanding and worth doing in stages if at all possible. Fortunately in 2005 I was fairly

young and reasonably strong, but the task would now take me longer. The physical fitness and stamina of the staff involved in such a project should be taken into account

- space in which to conduct the work: during the course of the project the non-fiction stock was moved around twice in order to accommodate the reclassified books. It was difficult to anticipate where the books would be relocated until they had been reclassified. I would recommend that, if at all possible, a temporary area should be arranged for the books to be held once they are reclassified, and until the whole job is finished and the movement in the main stock can be assessed. Certainly at SIAD there was not really enough room for this and it had to be done bit by bit
- the importance of setting smaller targets along the way in order to show, not only to oneself but also to line managers and others, that progress has been made
- documentation of everything that takes place: this will not only create a record of how a project was approached but will illustrate the challenges faced and how they were overcome. A record of the methodology will also provide evidence of good practice
- the need to maintain momentum. In my experience it is difficult to sustain the energy required if projects are done piecemeal (however this might just be my personal preferred method of working). Of course there is not always the money available to allocate to specific large-scale projects
- clear lines of reporting and contact. There was a good sense of continuity in the SIAD project, and other staff could ask questions of the one person carrying it out.

A written report at the end of the project is essential; such a report will provide evidence of what has been achieved both on a personal and a professional level, and also for the organisation. It will illustrate the outline, methodology, results and reflections which are key to developing good practice, disseminating information on how to manage projects.

Conclusion

The reclassification project at SIAD was the first major task I undertook at a Higher Education establishment. I was very pleased that it went so well and that the objectives of the task were met. Professionally it was a very rewarding and

productive experience and I learnt a great deal from it.

In summary, I would make a few general recommendations to anyone undertaking a similar project: be clear about the objectives of the task; plan carefully and include all resources likely to be required; communicate clearly with all who are involved and who will be affected; and finally, on completion write a report to provide a record of both what could have been improved and on the successful conclusion of the project.

References

1. Joan S. Mitchell et al., eds., *Dewey Decimal Classification and relative index*, 22 ed., 4 vols. (Dublin, OH: Online Computer Library Center, Inc., 2003).
2. *Ibid.*, 550.

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