
Hunter (2000) in the paper “Do we still need classification?” presents a very broad overview of various ways classification can be used for information management. Hunter takes a very simplistic approach to the paper; firstly discussing how classification is ‘basic to life’, and then discussing the use of classification in the library or information service. The main theme running through the paper as demonstrated in the title is that of whether we still need classification. Although Hunter strongly believes classification is essential, he also outlines various ways that one may perceive it to be archaic. The issues discussed in the paper include the use of classification in every day life, library classification including shelf arrangement, searching in libraries and full text databases and notation. Basically Hunter sees classification as ‘bringing together the like’ and “separating the unlike”. Although Hunter presents the issues clearly and systematically, the constant use of compelling and emotive language may lead some readers to doubt his credibility.

The paper is divided into three main parts; the introduction; explaining that classification is basic to life; the body; discussing classification in the library or information service and finally the conclusion. As previously mentioned the issues covered include shelf arrangement, searching and the library catalogue. Not surprisingly the Dewey Decimal system of classification is alluded to along with the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Strengths and weaknesses of the OLAP are discussed along with the use of a thesaurus to assist in indexing terms and establishing relationships between terms. The searching of full text databases is also explored in the paper. The two systems focused on are Boolean and hierarchical searching. Hunter(2000) displays how both Boolean searching and hierarchical searching is in fact a classification system, however it is the user that is classifying rather than the information professional. Finally, Hunter discusses the importance of notation in terms of classification highlighting once again the Dewey decimal classification along with a faceted classification scheme.
Hunter concludes his paper by emphasising the need for continuous classification for both printed and electronic documents and highlights the importance of librarians in the information age.

The paper is particularly easy to read and follow, in contrast to other papers on classification. The use of pictures, simplistic diagrams and anecdotes along with emotive and persuasive language is in direct contrast to other papers such as that by Tudhope and Binding (2004) and Kwasnik (1999). Both of these works present various aspects of classification in a more formal, professional and researched manner. While Hunter (2000) discusses various aspects of hierarchical classification, thesauri and faceted analysis, Tudhope and Binding explore the relationships between the three, providing an example of a hierarchical classification used in a thesauri and the way that this can be applied to a faceted analysis. This was particularly useful as it allowed the reader to understand the how the three concepts were directly related to each other. Although Hunters’ explanations were clear very limited detail was expressed and a more complex explanation would have been beneficial. Tudhope and Binding do give a more in depth discussion on these topics however the style of writing is particularly difficult to understand. Similarly, Kwasnik gives a thorough explanation into the use of hierarchies claiming, “Hierarchies are the preferred structures for knowledge representation”. It seems that other literature has devoted quite some research to the use of hierarchies, however Hunter has only included very limited information.

Hunter contends throughout the paper that classification systems and lessons learnt over the years have not been incorporated into the current online systems and that we should be looking to librarians to guide us in information management. Richmond (1981) as cited in La Barre (2004) agrees with this statement referring to librarians as “the individuals who possess the knowledge necessary to build complete, robust, and effective systems”. Secondly, Richmond expresses concern that librarians are reluctant to apply this knowledge in the use of online systems. What is of particular note is that Richmond first made these claims in 1981 and still in 2000 a paper has been written in the same topic area with almost an identical theme running through it. Thus it is evident that with the continuous expansion of electronic publishing’s and traditional published
works, the classification of online systems needs to be developed significantly, if it is to assist users in finding required information.

Hunter (2000) claims “to ignore classificatory techniques is to ignore one of the most powerful access tools that we possess”. While this statement is in part correct, classification is only useful if it is done thoroughly. For example Vanes (1993) had few positive thing say about classification systems in libraries claiming that complex systems may be a disincentive for library users. Although classification systems can be extremely useful when created and documented well, they can also be a source of frustration and discontent when done poorly. Throughout Hunters paper the use of classification is viewed as absolutely vital in the creation of any information management system. Hunter briefly questions the need for classification as it now possible to search entire documents online for key words. However as mentioned previously the user is actually using a classification themselves when narrowing a search. Once again this emphasises the presence of classification in everyday life. It does seem that the classification in information management is definitely necessary and this is evident in literature and library systems however the positive emphasis placed on classification is not necessarily mirrored in other papers.

Overall Hunters paper supplies the reader with a broad understanding of classification. It is evident that the themes presented in Hunters paper reflect that documented in other literature on the topic area. In comparison to other literature Hunters paper is very clear to understand and the themes are developed well throughout his argument. He endeavours to convince the reader classification is still vital in the information service and that we should learn from the past and in particular, the works of librarians.
References


