
BOOK REVIEWS

BROWN, A. G.: *Introduction to Subject Indexing: a Programmed Text*. Vol. 1: Subject Analysis and Practical Classification. (in collaboration with D. W. Langridge and J. Mills). London: C. Bingley. Hamden, Conn.: Linnet Books 1976. ISBN 0-85187-210-3; ISBN 0-208-01524-8. £ 3.50

The object of this book is to present "an integrated view of the basic principles and practices of subject indexing". It was one result of work on programmed texts funded by the Office of Scientific and Technical Information (OSTI) and before publication it was tried out on students at the School of Librarianship, Polytechnic of North London and at the College of Librarianship in Wales. Volume 1 covers pre-coordinate indexing, the subject analysis of documents and basic elements of translation into classification schemes. The term "index" is used in its broad sense covering library catalogs and bibliographies. "Subject indexing" includes classification of documents as well as retrieval of documents on "named subjects." For practical purposes, the Colon classification is used as an example and the whole book prepares its reader to classify documents using it. The second volume will cover the Universal Decimal Classification, as a means of constructing "classified and alphabetical subject catalogs." Indexing by words apparently will not be covered.

This programmed text is in the "scrambled" form. That is the user is led backwards and forwards from "frame" to "frame", according to his answers to questions designed to ensure that he understood the material in each passage. The book is in three sections covering a general introduction of 36 frames, the main discussion in a second section in two parts covering 94 frames, and a practical section of 73 frames. There is no index, although this plus a glossary of terms would have been helpful. An examination in Section 1 takes 9 frames, while that in Section 2, part 1 takes 16 frames, and the final examination in Section 3, counting tables, takes 7 frames. Thus the total text consists of 202 frames, of which 170 frames are text. A person who reads and understands what he reads can go through rather quickly. For example, in Section 2, Part 2, a very sharp student would have only to read 23 sections (out of 40). However, throughout the book there are careful explanations for the poorer reader who missed the point. Only one typographical error was noted in the whole book.

Section 2, Part 2 contains an excellent outline of subject analysis and is strongly recommended as remedial reading for students having trouble with this area. In the beginning Section, the use of set theory to describe a class is well done. The general format of the book is pleasing to the eye and capitalization of key terms is admirable. The student who put the book down for a week might not remember his definitions, however, and would have to hunt for them or re-read the text.

This type of book supplements classroom instruction rather than replaces it. In some places, the answers presented as correct depend on definitions which could be questioned. For example, it is assumed that the principal function of a library is information retrieval (frame 5). In teleological terms, perhaps this is so, but there is also a strong social reason for the existence of libraries: every citizen has a right to educate himself to the best of his ability and he should not be denied access to the materials he needs for this purpose because his financial circumstances. This was the basis for Andrew Carnegie's decision to provide free libraries. Less altruistically, very few people can afford to buy all the materials they wish to read and therefore a library exists to provide a common shared stock. It may not be a popular notion at present, but the library first and foremost has to be a resource center before it can even begin to provide service utilizing those resources. This reviewer would put the emphasis on sharing resources and then on answering requests for information. (This may be a result of some years' experience in a university library where each professor harbored the illusion that he and he alone used the resources in his discipline).

What the programmed text lacks, of necessity, is the means for discussion between student and teacher or student and student. This is just as important in education as reading and digesting the works recommended. As Ranganathan was wont to say, the teacher learns from the student and the students from each other as well as from the teacher. The programmed text and the self-teaching computer programs are convenient for solo learning, but the exciting part is the confrontation of different viewpoints and the expansion of the mind that results from being forced to look at things from more than one angle. This only comes with group learning, the "group" beginning with a minimum of two individuals.

A somewhat different point concerns the inclusion of 14 frames on the recall-precision problem. While this is of interest, as a result of Rowena Swanson's devastating review of the state-of-the-art of evaluation studies¹, one would hesitate to recommend or cite as factual any procedure in which the criterion variables have not yet been defined.

Finally, with such a didactic type of learning, one would appreciate a good dose of the late Paul Dunkin's skepticism². No doubt too much questioning confuses the beginner, but bald statement of "fact" which is not necessarily fact (because of confusion between opinion and fact) does not produce a scholar. Far be it for a pragmatic American to suggest that all librarians and information scientists be scholars. but should we not at least aim in this direction, if only to improve the prestige of the profession?

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- 1 Swanson, Rowena: Design and evaluation of information systems. In: *Ann. Rev. Inform. Sci. & Technol.*— Washington, D.C.: Amer. Soc. Inform. Sci. 1975. Vol.10, p. 43–101 and Swanson, Rowena: Performing evaluation studies in information science. In: *J. Amer. Soc. Inform. Sci.* 26 (1975) p. 140–156.
- 2 Dunkin, P. S.: *Cataloging in U.S.A.* — Chicago: Amer. Libr. Assoc. 1969. p. 65–153.