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The Future of KF Modified in Canadian Law Libraries: A Research Report

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The Future of KF Modified[1] in Canadian Law Libraries
A Research Report by F. Tim Knight

When the Canadian law library community learned that some of the major law libraries had stopped using the KF Modified classification questions about the long-term future of the system began to emerge. Were there many other libraries considering a move away from KF Modified? How might this affect the support of the classification system in the future? Is this the beginning of the end for KF Modified? This research report explores the use of classification in Canadian law libraries and intends to clarifying the current and long-term status of KF Modified in Canadian law libraries.

The survey was developed during the early summer of 2001 and mailed to 431 Canadian law libraries in July. The survey was directed to either the Head of the Technical Services department or the person responsible for cataloguing in the library and consisted of two parts: the first part dealt with general information and questions concerning past, present and possible future classification system use; the second part, for KF Modified users, dealt specifically with aspects of the KF Modified system. The mailing list was compiled using the current KF Modified subscription list, and the Canadian Association of Law Libraries (CALL) 2000 and American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) 2000-2001 directories. In addition, a number of medium to large sized law libraries were selected from the 2001 edition of Canadian Law List. A total of 183 surveys were returned representing a response rate of approximately 42%.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Although KF Modified has been in use in Canadian law libraries for over thirty years there has been little written about the classification system in the library science literature. The articles that are available are primarily of an historical nature or describe the main characteristics of the scheme. And, aside from an indirect reference to the use of KF Modified in a 1995 CALL survey of technical services practices, there has been no formal research on its use reported in the literature.

TYPE AND SIZE OF LAW LIBRARIES
The majority of respondents (40%) came from law libraries in Ontario which, along with the responses from the other provinces and territories, happens to reflect the geographic breakdown of the original mailing database [Fig. 1]. Most of the law libraries (54%) reported that they were law firm libraries. Government, court house and academic libraries taken together account for 35% and law society, corporate, and "other"[2] categories represent the remaining 20% of respondents [Fig. 2].

A significant number (71%) reported that their libraries contain less than 20,000 titles while the medium and large sized libraries each represent about 15% of the total [Fig. 3]. Most of the corporate, court house and law firm libraries reported having less than 20,000 titles in their

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1. KF Classification modified for use in Canadian law libraries.

2. A total of three "other" libraries were reported. Two were legislative and the third was a legal aid library.

collections while the government and law society libraries are more evenly distributed across the small and medium sized range. Most of the academic libraries and the two legislative libraries hold over 100,000 titles [Fig. 4].

NATURE OF LIBRARY COLLECTIONS
When asked about the nature of their collections the smaller libraries reported that they provide either a general topical coverage or they focus on a few specific practice areas. However, the smaller libraries tend to offer a more focused approach regarding jurisdictional coverage. The medium sized libraries were evenly split with respect to the scope of their jurisdictional coverage. This was also true for their topical range where they exhibit only a slightly higher tendency toward a collection focused on selected practice areas. The larger libraries provide a more comprehensive approach to both topic and jurisdiction with a tendency not to focus on specific topics or jurisdictions in their collections [Fig. 5].

The academic libraries present the clearest picture when looking at the nature of the collection according to the particular type of library. They offer general and comprehensive coverage in both topic area and jurisdiction. The corporate libraries reported a focused topical approach while providing general jurisdictional coverage. Government libraries were similar but show a higher number focusing on selected jurisdictions. Both law society and court house libraries tend to provide a general topical approach, but the law society libraries differed from their court house counterparts by being slightly more focused when it came to jurisdictional representation. While law firm libraries ranked higher in the areas of focused topic and jurisdiction, many also provide comprehensive topical coverage and to a lesser extent a general jurisdictional coverage [Fig. 6].

CATALOGUING RESPONSIBILITY
About three quarters of the libraries stated that they are responsible for their own cataloguing and classification. Of those libraries using an external cataloguing service most are law firm libraries (57%). Law libraries relying on a central library for their cataloguing are mainly court house (50%) and academic libraries (29%).

While the cataloguing in law firm libraries is carried out by the whole range of library workers there is an emphasis toward administrative assistants and "other". Types reported by law firm libraries in the "other" category were primarily library technicians, but a consultant, a secretary, a paralegal, and a lawyer were also mentioned. Corporate libraries report that administrative assistants tend to be responsible for the library's cataloguing duties, while the court house libraries rely more on either administrative assistants or library clerks to do their cataloguing. Although professional librarians perform cataloguing in the law firm libraries it is usually only part of their general responsibilities and not considered their main role in the library. To some degree this is reflected in the 0.65 average number of full-time employees cataloguing in law firm libraries. Cataloguing librarians figure much more prominently in the academic, government and law society libraries where they are likely found sharing their cataloguing responsibilities with para-professionals and cataloguing technicians [Fig. 7]. Average full-time

figures for these library types are 1.31, 1.81 and 1.67 respectively.

The smaller libraries, like the law firm libraries, tend to use administrative assistants, library clerks, library technicians, and para-professionals to perform cataloguing in their libraries. And also like the law firms libraries, the average full-time rate is relatively low at 0.58. In the medium and larger sized libraries, librarians and cataloguing technicians are reported to be in the majority with a full-time average of 1.23 in the medium sized libraries and 2.23 in the larger libraries [Fig. 8].

CURRENT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS
The KF Modified classification system is currently used by 84 of all reporting libraries. A local system is used by 63 libraries, Library of Congress Classification (LCC) by 43, Moys by 17, 7 are using the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and 6 use the Los Angeles County Association classification (LAC) [Fig. 9]. In addition to the six classification systems enumerated in the survey, CODOC was the most mentioned classification system in the "other" category. The Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) and the UBC History ("F") scheme were also reported.

Although approximately 81% of the libraries are using a single classification system to organize their collections the remaining libraries use a combination of two or more classification systems. Of those who reported using a single classification system 41% use KF Modified. A local in-house system ranks second with 33%. Moys at 11% exceeds the use of LCC by 3%, and each of the remaining reported systems are used by only 2-3% of the libraries [Fig. 10].

Virtually all of the law firm libraries are currently using a single classification system. This holds true for most of the corporate, court house, law society, "other" and government libraries as well. Academic libraries are using two system combinations just as much as they are using a single system. The use of two classification systems also appears in government, court house, "other" and law society libraries. Libraries using three systems are mainly of the academic and corporate type, but to a lesser extent three systems are also used by government and law society libraries [Fig. 11]. The single library reporting the use of four systems is an academic library.

Almost all of the smaller libraries, and most of the medium sized libraries, are using a single classification system. A combination of two systems comes out slightly higher than one system in the larger libraries and the three and four system mixes are used only by the medium and large sized libraries [Fig. 12].

Of the 26 libraries using two systems, 40% favor LCC while KF Modified comes in at a close second with 35%. Only 12% of the reporting libraries are using a local system, and the "other" category, DDC and Moys occupy 8%, 4% and 2% respectively. Of those libraries using KF Modified 15 use it with LCC and 3 are using it with a local system [Fig. 13].

Only 8 libraries report using three classification systems. Of these 33% are using LCC, 21% KF Modified and 29 a local system. LAC and "other" are each used by 8% [Fig. 14]. Those

libraries using KF Modified here are using it with either LCC and a local system (4 libraries) or with LCC and one of the systems reported in the "other" category (1 library). Only 1 library reported using four systems combining KF Modified with LCC, LAC and a local system.

Approximately 85% of respondents reported that they were satisfied with their particular classification system or combination of systems. The source of this opinion was attributed to their experience performing reference work (48%) and comments from library users (31%). Among the comments made under "other" the "absence of complaints from library users" was predominant.

PREVIOUSLY USED CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS
When asked about previously used classification systems 31% reported that they had used a different system in the past. Most of these (59%) had been using a locally developed system and changed to a different system to better meet the research needs of their library users and exercise greater control over their collections. All of the classification systems listed in the survey were used in the past [Fig. 15]. Only 2 of the libraries indicated that they had previously been using KF Modified. Of these 2 libraries one moved to their own local system and the other to a combination of LCC and a local system. Most of those who marked "other" for this question had originally had collections arranged alphabetically. One library also mentioned using a modified form of CODOC, another stated that their primary materials were unclassified, and one respondent was unsure about the previous arrangement.

Of the 56 libraries who reported using a different system in the past 22 chose KF Modified as their new single classification system. Most of these libraries were leaving local systems (14), but 3 had changed from Moys and 2 from LCC. Those now using KF modified in a two system combination had also primarily been using a local system (5) with 3 switching from LAC and 1 from LCC. And 3 libraries now using KF Modified in a three system mix had changed from their local systems and 1 from LAC. The majority of those changing to KF Modified were law firm libraries (23) with 5 academic and 1 or 2 corporate, court house, law society and government libraries making up the balance.

NEW CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS CONSIDERED
Only 17% of all the libraries indicated that they are currently considering a change to a different classification system in the future. Of these 10 are thinking of moving to LCC, 7 to KF Modified or a local system, and 6 to Moys [Fig. 16]. And 1 library, currently using a local system, stated that they are considering a change but are not sure which system they would choose. Libraries cited research needs and control of the collection as the main reasons for considering a change, however, almost 20% reported that the costs of cataloguing are also now a factor. The primary reasons listed under "other" included standardization, a desire to have consistent systems used between branch libraries, and the need to maintain the same system as the library relied on for copy cataloguing.

There are 4 libraries currently using KF Modified who indicated that they are considering changing to either Moys (2), LCC (1), or a local system (1). While this potentially means 4 less

KF Modified users, there are also 7 libraries who are considering adopting the KF Modified system. Of these, 5 are currently using a local system, 1 is using DDC and 1 is using Moys. Most of those considering KF modified are law firm libraries (5) with 1 corporate and 1 court house library also interested.

KF MODIFIED USERS
Of the 46% of libraries reporting that they use KF Modified, 42% have been using the classification scheme for 10 to 19 years, 21% for 20 to 29 years, 13% for 5 years or less, 12% for thirty or more years and 9% for 5 to 9 years. Two (2) percent were not sure how long they had been using the system [Fig. 17]. Most of these libraries (61%) report they are current subscribers, and of those who are not, 34% had been subscribers at one time.

The majority of KF Modified users are found in Ontario (58%) with the next largest segment reporting from Alberta (19%). Together Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia total 15%, and New Brunswick represents 5%. Only 1% each reported they were from Québec, Nunavut and the Northwest Territory [Fig. 18].

Law firm libraries represent the largest number of libraries by type currently using KF Modified (42%). Of the other library types reporting 19% are court house libraries, 15% government, 9% academic, 8% law society and 6% corporate libraries [Fig. 19]. KF Modified is also used primarily in the smaller libraries (68%) compared with 21% in the medium sized and 11% in the larger libraries [Fig. 20]. These smaller libraries are equally represented by each of corporate, court house, government and law firm library types. KF Modified users in the law society libraries were divided between the smaller and medium sized libraries and the majority of academic libraries using KF Modified had collections of over 100,000 [Fig. 21].

The use of KF Modified on its own ranked higher in law libraries where collections are focused on selected practice areas. It is also more likely to be used in a library covering selected jurisdictional areas. Libraries with a more comprehensive approach to topic and jurisdiction in their collections tend to use KF Modified in combination with one or more additional classification systems [Fig. 22]. The need to use additional systems is likely necessary when the content of a library's collection extends beyond the common law coverage provided by KF Modified or includes a high level of non-law material.

When asked which format the schedule should be made available in 45% were happy to continue using the print version. However, an almost equal number (41%) would like to access the schedule over the Internet. Most (77%) of the KF Modified users who completed this section reported that the classification system was easy to use, but 61% also indicated that a manual would help facilitate use and make it easier to train new cataloguers. A large number (78%) would also be interested in attending a training session or workshop and many (58%) would participate in an email discussion group if made available. Attendance at the KF Modified User Group meetings held at the annual CALL conferences was relatively low at 24%.

DISCUSSION

The KF Modified classification system had its beginnings when a group of "concerned academic law librarians", led by Shih-Sheng Hu from the University of Manitoba, met in the summer of 1968.[3] Since that time the use and support of this classification system has grown well beyond the three original academic libraries involved and is now found in every type and size of law library in Canada. In 1984 it was reported that 35 libraries were using KF Modified[4]. As reported here that number has grown to include at least 84 libraries. This represents a substantial increase in the use of this classification system over the past seventeen years.

The growth in the use of KF Modified is all the more remarkable when one considers that the promotion of this classification system has essentially been by word of mouth. There has been no formal promotion, at least recently, and little has been written about its use. As a result many newer librarians may be unfamiliar with it or may not have been exposed to it at all. Consider this comment from one librarian currently using DDC: "KF Modified may be very appropriate, but at this point I must admit I know nothing about it." An outreach program or a renewed workshop series, along with the development of a user manual, might help reinforce the practice of current users and increase awareness for those who have never used KF Modified. As the findings indicate, many respondents would be interested in a manual and attending a session like this.

There is a clear majority of respondents (92 %) who reported that KF Modified remains a useful system. One librarian wrote that they would consider changing to another classification system, "Only if KF Mod. dies!!" A possible explanation for this high level of satisfaction might be rooted in the consensus maintained by the originating librarians present at the 1968 KF Modified meeting:

> "... it was highly preferable, given the nature of legal research in Canadian libraries, to classify all common law materials together by subject rather than use a jurisdictional approach which would have resulted in each jurisdiction having its own classification schedule."[5]

This view is echoed in this comment from a library that had recently switched to KF Modified after using the LCC KE classification schedule: "With KE they complained that works on the same topic were found in too many different places (according to jurisdiction)." This problem would be compounded if the library were to use the individual schedules available for each of the common law jurisdictions when all of the LCC K class schedules are used. More research into how KF Modified serves legal research in a common law environment would be beneficial.

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3. Ginsberg, Classification schemes used in law libraries in Canada, p. 392.

4. Rashid, "KF Canadian adaption scheme", p. 77.

5. Ibid, p. 392.

The survey findings also reveal a stable foundation of KF Modified users. About 33% of the libraries using KF Modified have been using it for more than twenty years. But perhaps more significantly, 13% have begun using this system within the last five years. In addition, there are another 7 libraries who report that KF Modified is under consideration for use in their library in the future. One court house librarian also commented that they are considering adopting the system because the Law Society in their province is, "in the process of changing to KF Modified." It is likely that other libraries who rely on the Law Society for cataloguing support, and who may not have participated in this survey, will also be interested in using the system. And, it is interesting to note that of all the libraries who had changed classification systems in the past, only 4 libraries reported that they had switched from KF Modified.

In terms of current cataloguing support for KF Modified the following comment about the Cataloguing in Publication (CIP) program is worth considering: "I have a concern that publishers appear to be dropping the KF Modified CIP, which is tough on small libraries like mine." This trend has been observed in a number of recent publications. Over half (55%) of the 183 survey respondents indicate that they use CIP data in their cataloguing processes. Most of these libraries (59%) are small libraries with less than 20,000 titles in their collection [Fig. 23] and limited resources to devote to cataloguing and classification. In relation to libraries using KF Modified, the number of CIP users in the smaller libraries increases slightly to 66% [Fig. 24]. These figures indicate that a significant number of law libraries rely on CIP as a source for their KF Modified class numbers making it important that this service continues to be made available.

CONCLUSIONS
The original impetus for this research was based on an impression that law libraries had begun to drop KF Modified and a growing concern that other libraries might soon follow suit. This perception may or may not have been fueled by the increasing absence of KF Modified classification numbers in newer publications. The relatively small size of the survey sample makes one cautious when drawing a concrete conclusion. However, the findings appear to confirm that KF Modified is still alive and well. The findings certainly show that there is a well established and growing user base. It is also evident that law librarians are satisfied with its performance and continue to consider it a useful classification system in their libraries.

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