358

Knowl. Org. 43(2016)No.5
D. Martínez-Ávila and J. Beak. Methods, Theoretical Frameworks and Hope for Knowledge Organization

Methods, Theoretical Frameworks and Hope for Knowledge Organization

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the epistemic stances and research methods and techniques of the thirty-three journal articles that Hope Olson published during the period 1991-2015. For the analysis of the epistemic stances, we use Hjørland's classification of epistemological stances (namely rationalism, empiricism, historicism, and pragmatism), and for the classification of methodologies and methods we use the taxonomy used by Beak et al., loosely based on the consulted literature. Results of the analysis are presented and discussed in the context of the poststructuralist stance adopted by Hope Olson throughout her career. We highlight the impact of the innovative research methods and techniques and poststructuralist theoretical frameworks that Hope Olson introduced and used in knowledge organization.

1.0 Introduction

Having the fortune of encountering Professor Hope Olson (both her work and the person) can be described as a very liberating experience in academia. Theory and practice in knowledge organization (KO) can be an alienating experience for conscious students and professionals trapped in the technical waters of positivism. The tyranny of the "one right answer" in KO (together with the prejudices of the standards, rigidity of the standards, cultural imposi-

tions, and other problems such as "bibliocentrism."[1]), is something that probably most students have experienced at some point. KO is full of presumptions, sometimes subtle and unstated, and the mere questioning of those presumptions, principles, "one right answers," decisions, and even alternatives is sometimes perceived by instructors and supervisors as lack of knowledge of the standards or the matter and even a potential threat for the field. Hope Olson, however, always encouraged students to question those presumptions and think critically. In her classes and

throughout her research, Olson always made it clear that she adopted a poststructuralist stance; this means the questioning of underlying assumptions, the rejection of universal truths, and the exposition of realities as constructed by discourses. She also always made it clear that she adopted critical feminist and postcolonial approaches to provide agency to her methodologies and studies. In our field, a very professional and practical one, she knew that it might not be enough to just intellectually deconstruct binaries, so she gave them a social and ethical impetus to achieve practical applications and goals. With her research and teaching, Hope Olson did not only influence and inspire many students to follow her path but also fought and changed many injustices in the profession. Aware of the controversy of some of her research topics and the possible resistance to acceptance of some of her ideas, one of the key aspects of her success was the meticulous and faultless use of the research methods and methodologies. She had to strive to do so in order to silence the potential positivist, sexist, racist and imperialist critics. In this paper, we attempt to pay homage to the relevance of her work while studying and reviewing those research methods that she used in her journal articles.

2.0 Poststructuralism and research methods

Neil deGrasse Tyson relates in *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey* (2014) how the works of Chinese philosopher Mo Tze were destroyed by the measures of the first emperor and unifier of China Qin Shi Huang. As Neil deGrasse Tyson narrates, Qin Shi Huang took drastic measures to standardize everything within the empire, including mandating a single coinage, making all weights and measures uniform, the width of carts and roads, as well as the precise way the Chinese language was to be written. This story evokes the efforts on universality and standardization of Melvil Dewey, Charles Cutter, and other "fathers" of library science, and not only related to KO but also to many other aspects such as Dewey's "simpler spelings" (e.g., Dewey 1932) and more. As in the case of Qin Shi Huang, these measures can also have disastrous effects for diversity and culture in subject access. Aware of this, Hope Olson has been one of the leading exponents of change of the last decades while denouncing and fighting social injustice in library standards. Olson has deconstructed the foundational texts of these authors using the most sophisticated poststructuralist techniques and proposed ameliorative counter-measures from feminist and postcolonial stances. Of course, much of Olson's intellectual knowledge and sensibility to universality comes from her postmodernist and poststructuralist background, two schools that are not exempt of criticism in the most positivist circles of academia.

While critics and proponents of positivism might see the poststructuralist stance as "unscientific" according to the objective dogmas of academia, Hope Olson strived to use the most rigorous and innovative poststructuralist methodologies and theories to conduct sound and relevant research. Hope Olson's studies not only exposed the assumptions and realities as constructed, and therefore potentially demolishable, but also her methods served as a valuable source of inspiration for other researchers in the area embracing poststructuralism.

Interested in epistemology as she was, it is not a surprise that the methodological aspects were a fundamental part of her papers. The link between the epistemology and methodology has been highlighted in different studies (e.g., Bradley 1993; Mattos et al. 2015; Martínez-Ávila et al. 2016). While discussing the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods regarding epistemology, Hope Olson (1995) echoed Lynn Westbrook (1994) suggesting that the distinction is of a different research "paradigm" rather than a method. She also echoed Barbara Wildemuth (1993), suggesting that it is rather a difference between positivist and interpretive paradigms in which the former recognizes an objective reality not dependent on the researcher, and the latter views reality as subjective and socially constructed. Olson also cites Wildemuth's observation in which she links the epistemic assumption to the method and she sees the method determined by the epistemology, not vice versa (Wildemuth 1993, 451):

> It is true that the positivist approach, with its goal of discerning the statistical regularities of behavior, is oriented toward counting the occurrences and measuring the extent of the behaviors being studied. By contrast, the interpretive approach, with its goal of understanding the social world from the viewpoint of the actors within it, is oriented toward detailed description of the actors' cognitive and symbolic actions, that is, the meanings associated with observable behaviors.

Hope Olson (1995) stated that "methodology develops from the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance," and right after this claim she cited Gareth Morgan and Linda Smircich's differentiation of ontological and epistemological stances (1980). Olson commonly used this spectrum from subjectivist to objectivist to illustrate the ontological assumptions, epistemological stances, and the relation between the knowing subject and the studied (known) object for different theories (see Table 1, made by Olson and often used in her classes).

For instance, a parallelism could be drawn between Sandra Harding's classification of feminist epistemologies (1986), namely the empiricist/positivist approach, stand-

360   Knowl. Org. 43(2016)No.5

D. Martínez-Ávila and J. Beak. Methods, Theoretical Frameworks and Hope for Knowledge Organization

	Subjectivist ⟵—————————————⟶ Objectivist				
Ontological Assumptions	Multiple Realities	Reality as a Social Construction	Reality as a Contextual Field of Information	Reality as a Concrete Process	Reality as a Concrete Structure
Assumptions about Humanity	Individuals Constructing and Constructed by Discourses	Social Constructors	Information Processors	Adaptors	Responders
Epistemological Stance	To Uncover the Underlying Presumptions of Our Realities	To Understand How Social Reality is Created	To Map Contexts	To Study Systems, Processes, Change	To Construct a Positivist Science
Examples of Epistemic Stances	*Poststructuralist*		*Cognitive*		*Empiricist*

Table 1. Theories of knowledge (Adapted from Gareth Morgan and Linda Smircich 1980, 492)

point approach, and poststructuralist approach (as discussed in Fox and Olson 2012), and the different regions of the spectrum from the objectivist to subjectivist respectively. For the record, Olson always positioned herself in the subjectivist poststructuralist side in which the ontological assumption is the existence of multiple realities, and the epistemological stance tries to uncover the underlying assumptions of those realities. If there is a relation between the epistemological and ontological stance and the methodology used then her research methods should reflect and be based on that position.

3.0 Methodology

Hope Olson has an impressive publication record. In the timespan of about twenty-five years, she has published more than eighty papers including journal articles, books, book chapters and conference papers. She has also given numerous presentations at national and international conferences around the world all of which have been made available in different ways. For this study, we only analyzed the thirty-three journal articles that she published from 1991 to 2015 (see Table 2). These thirty-three articles were published in a total of twenty journals. Sixteen of these papers were published by Hope Olson alone, four articles were published in co-authorship with Hope as the first author and thirteen in co-authorship with Hope as second or subsequent author. The majority of the papers in which she is not the first author have been published during the beginning of her career and close to her retirement.

For the analysis of the articles, we adopted the methodology used in Beak et al. (2015) and continued in Mattos et al. (2015). For each article, we analyzed the epistemic stance and the methods and techniques used. Regarding the analysis of the epistemic stances, and in spite of the differences and variety of classifications in the literature (see for instance Creswell 2007; Cibangu 2010; Lor 2014), we opted for using Hjørland's classification of epistemological stances (see for instance 2009; 2013), as we consider it to be solid and widely accepted and used in KO. This classification simplifies and synthesizes the epistemological stances in four main schools (classes or families of theories): rationalism, empiricism, historicism, and pragmatism. Regarding the classification of methodologies and methods used, and also despite the heterogeneity and lack of consensus in the literature (see for instance Järvelin and Vakkari 1990; Creswell 2007; Hider and Pymm 2008; Cibangu 2010; Bufrem et al., 2015; Chu 2015), we used the taxonomy previously used by Beak et al. (2005), loosely based on the consulted literature.

4.0 Results

The analysis shows that pragmatism is the predominant epistemological stance in Olson's articles, as twenty-two of the thirty-three analyzed articles (67%) were identified as pragmatist (see Figure 1). This finding is consistent with the overtly stated feminist and postcolonial approaches (that set the goals of her research). Following this, eight out of the thirty-three articles (24%) were identified as empiricist, and three of the thirty-three articles (9%) were

Author	Title	Source	Vol.	Is.	Pages	Year
Kathy Carter; Hope Olson; Sam Aquila	Bulk loading of records for microform sets into the online catalogue	*Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*	13	3/4	201-209	1991
Sheila Bertram; Hope Olson	Culture clash	*Library Journal*	121	17	36-37	1996
Hope Olson; Toni Samek	Library and information studies faculty in Canada: A sex ratio study	*Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*	36	2	155-169	1996
Olson, Hope A.	The feminist and the emperor's new clothes: Feminist deconstruction as a critical methodology for library and information studies	*Library & Information Science Research*	19	2	181-198	1997
Olson, Hope A.	Thinking professionals: Teaching critical cataloguing	*Technical Services Quarterly*	15	1/2	51-66	1997
Olson, Hope A.	Education for cataloguing is/as women's studies	*Serials Librarian*	35	1/2	153-166	1998
Olson, Hope A.	Mapping beyond Dewey's boundaries: Constructing classificatory space for marginalized knowledge domains	*Library Trends*	47	2	233-254	1998
Olson, Hope A.	Exclusivity, teleology and hierarchy: Our Aristotelean legacy	*Knowledge Organization*	26	2	65-73	1999
Olson, Hope A.	Difference, culture, and change: The untapped potential of LCSH	*Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*	29	1/2	53-71	2000
Olson, Hope A.	Globalisation, diversity and information	*Education for Library and Information Services: Australia (ELIS:A)*	17	1/3	19-22	2000
Olson, Hope A.	The power to name: Representation in library catalogues	*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*	26	3	639-668	2001
Olson, Hope A.	Sameness and difference: A cultural foundation of classification	*Library Resources & Technical Services*	45	3	115-122	2001
Olson, Hope A.	Patriarchal structures of subject access and subversive techniques for change	*Canadian Journal for Information and Library Science*	26	2/3	1-29	2001
Olson, Hope A.; Rose Schlegl.	Standardization, objectivity, and user focus: A meta–analysis	*Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*	32	2	61-80	2001
Olson, Hope A.	Classification and universality: Application and construction	*Semiotica*	139	1/4	377-391	2002
Lisa M. Given; Hope A. Olson.	Knowledge organization in research: A conceptual model for organizing data	*Library & Information Science Research*	25		157-176	2003
Angela Kublik; Virginia Clevette; Dennis B. Ward; Hope A. Olson	Adapting dominant classifications to particular contexts	*Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*	37	1/2	13-31	2003
Hope A. Olson; Lisa M. Given	Indexing and the 'organized' researcher	*The Indexer*	23	3	129-133	2003
Hope A. Olson	The ubiquitous hierarchy: An army to overcome the threat of a mob	*Library Trends*	52	3	604-616	2004
Hur-Li Lee; Hope A. Olson	Hierarchical navigation: An exploration of Yahoo! Directories	*Knowledge Organization*	32	1	10-24	2005

Table 2. Journal articles authored or co-authored by Hope Olson →

362

Knowl. Org. 43(2016)No.5
D. Martínez-Ávila and J. Beak. Methods, Theoretical Frameworks and Hope for Knowledge Organization

Author	Title	Source	Vol.	Is.	Pages	Year
Hope A. Olson	Codes, costs, and critiques: The organization of information in Library Quarterly, 1931-2004	*Library Quarterly*	76	1	19-35	2006
Hope A. Olson	How we construct subjects: A feminist analysis	*Library Trends*	56	2	509-541	2007
Hope A. Olson; Dietmar Wolfram.	Syntagmatic relationships and indexing consistency on a larger scale	*Journal of Documentation*	64	4	602-615	2008
Dietmar Wolfram; Hope A Olson; Raina Bloom	Measuring consistency for multiple taggers using vector space modeling	*Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*	60	10	1995-2003	2009
Hope A. Olson	Earthly order and the oneness of mysticism: Hugh of Saint Victor and medieval classification of Wisdom	*Knowledge Organization*	37	2	121-138	2010
Bharat Mehra; Hope A. Olson; Suzana Ahmad	Integrating diversity across the LIS curriculum: An exploratory study of instructors' perceptions and practices online	*IFLA Journal*	37	1	39-51	2011
Hope A. Olson	A potência do não percebido: Hegel, Dewey, e seu lugar na corrente principal do pensamento classificatório / The power of the unperceived: Hegel, Dewey, and their place in mainstream classificatory thought	*InCID: Revista de Ciência da Informação e Documentação*	2	1	3-15	2011
Daniel Martínez-Ávila; Hope A Olson; Margaret Kipp	New roles and global agents in information organization in Spanish libraries	*Knowledge Organization*	39	2	125-136	2012
Daniel Martínez-Ávila; Margaret Kipp; Hope A. Olson	DDC or BISAC: The changing balance between corporations and public institutions	*Knowledge Organization*	39	5	309-319	2012
Steven J. Miller; Hur-Li Lee; Hope A Olson; Richard P. Smiraglia	Online cataloging education at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee	*Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*	50	2/3	110-126	2012
Daniel Martínez-Ávila; Rosa San Segundo; Hope A. Olson	The use of BISAC in libraries as new cases of reader-interest classifications	*Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*	52	2	137-155	2014
Dennis N. Ocholla; Lyudmila Ocholla; Hope A. Olson; Jeannette R. Glover; José Augusto Guimarães	A comparison of cataloguing and classification education (CCE) in library and information science in South Africa, Brazil and the USA (SOBUSA): An overview	*African Journal of Library, Archives & Information Science*	25	1	15-27	2015
Lei Zhang; Hope A. Olson	Distilling abstractions: Genre redefining essence versus context	*Library Trends*	63	3	540-554	2015

(*Table 2* continued)

identified as historicist. No article was identified as rationalist. Seven out of the eight "empiricist" papers were published in co-authorship, and in only one of the empiricist papers was Hope Olson was the first author. The only paper that might be considered empiricist that was authored by Hope Olson alone is "Codes, Costs, and Critiques: The Organization of Information in *Library Quarterly*, 1931-2004," a quantitative and thematic content analysis of the KO literature in the journal *Library Quarterly*.

As for the methods, the majority (67%) of Olson's articles present a text-based methodology, including critical writing, deconstruction, discourse analysis, document analysis, content analysis and conceptual analysis (see Figure 2). User-involved methods, such as questionnaire and observation, were used in three articles (9%), and numeric methods (statistical analysis) in two (6%). Other methods were identified in six papers (18%), including two case studies, and other innovative methods and theoretical frameworks introduced from critical and poststructuralist studies. If we limit the analysis to the sixteen articles that were published by Hope Olson as a single author, it results in only text-based methods (seven critical writings, three deconstructions, two discourse analyses, one content analysis) and other poststructuralist and critical methods.
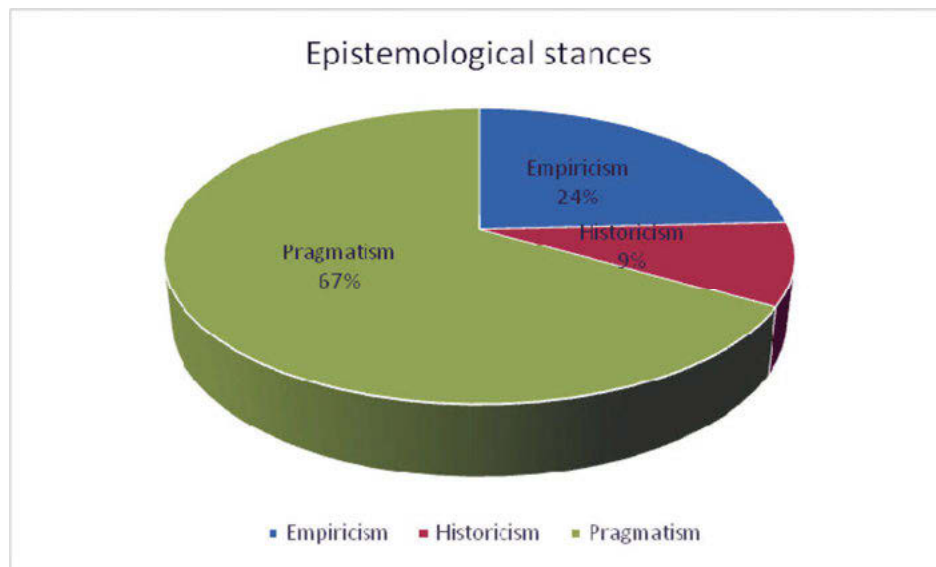
Knowl. Org. 43(2016)No.5
D. Martínez-Ávila and J. Beak. Methods, Theoretical Frameworks and Hope for Knowledge Organization

363

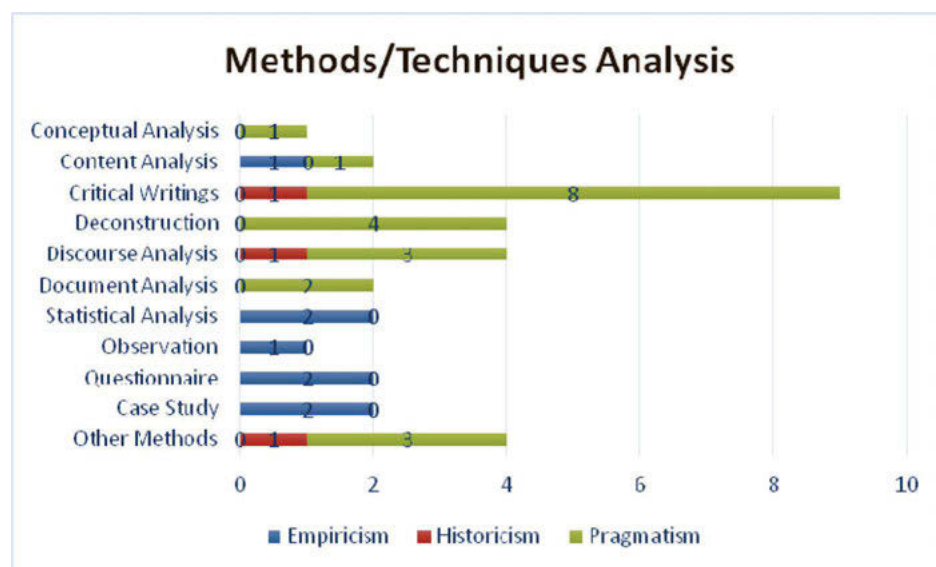*Figure 1.* Epistemological stances in Hope Olson's articles

Figure 2. Analysis of methods/techniques in Hope Olson's articles

The feminist stance in Hope Olson's *oeuvre* is explicit in many of the analyzed articles, something that is closely linked to the epistemic stance and also the methodology. For instance, in "The Feminist and the Emperor's New Clothes: Feminist Deconstruction as a Critical Methodology for Library and Information studies" and "Patriarchal Structures of Subject Access and Subversive Techniques for Change" she draws on feminism to give an active orientation to her deconstruction, "because adding a feminist perspective adds a political stance that calls for ameliorative change" (Olson 2001, 2). Deconstruction is the method of textual analysis and philosophical argument used by Jacques Derrida in books such as (in translation), *Of Grammatology, Writing and Difference, Speech and*

Phenomena, Margins of Philosophy and Dissemination. Olson is familiar with Derrida's works and states (1997, 181): "Deconstruction is a methodology with potential for library and information studies (LIS) for identifying and questioning underlying theoretical assumptions … deconstruction grows out of poststructuralism, a critical approach that accepts the existence of multiple truths and realities and, thus, rejects universal explanations." Olson also adds that in order to develop a deconstructive approach appropriate to LIS, she draws on the work done by Patti Latter (1991) in education, Drucilla Cornell (1992) in law, and Marta B. Calas and Linda Smircich (1991) in organizational analysis. In "Patriarchal Structures of Subject Access and Subversive Techniques for

364

Knowl. Org. 43(2016)No.5
D. Martínez-Ávila and J. Beak. Methods, Theoretical Frameworks and Hope for Knowledge Organization

Change" she also acknowledges the use of more feminist authors for her analysis, such as Elaine Marks and Hélène Cixous. Although Hope Olson introduced the Derridean deconstruction in her 1997 article, "The Feminist and the Emperor's New Clothes," a mention to an "artificial dichotomy" and arguably elements of deconstruction were introduced earlier in "Culture Clash."

Feminist theories and Drucilla Cornell's philosophy of the limit are present in other papers that do not use deconstruction as the first method too, for instance in "Thinking Professionals: Teaching Critical Cataloguing," and "Mapping Beyond Dewey's Boundaries: Constructing Classificatory Space for Marginalized Knowledge Domains." The latter is identified in our methods and techniques analysis as "others" as none of her innovative techniques is usually listed as a method in the literature. This paper introduces theories and ideas of geography and spatial metaphors as "Geography offers concepts for building a theoretical framework to ameliorate the biases of classification" (Olson 1998, 322). Olson uses and introduces concepts such as Lorraine Code's (1995) "rhetorical spaces," as sites where topics could be taken seriously as legitimate subjects for open discussion, Gillian Rose's (1993) "paradoxical spaces," which are simultaneously or alternately in the center and at the margin and Henri Lefebvre's (1991) "transparent space," which denies the existence of anything excluded from its mapping because it appears to be all there is. She also uses feminist authors such as bell hooks and Elspeth Probyn. Olson (1998, 252) concludes the article stating that the "new theoretical framework developed throughout this article is offered as a new way of mapping knowledge in classification. It has potential for both analysis and amelioration."

In "Exclusivity, Teleology and Hierarchy: Our Aristotelean Legacy," Olson uses a Foucauldian discourse analysis as part of her poststructuralist stance (1996, 66): "Discourse analysis is a poststructural methodology and is especially useful for identifying and questioning underlying presumptions that operate to construct our realities. Poststructuralism, as a critical philosophy, questions the existence of universal principles. Therefore, it is appropriate for identifying culturally specific principles as such." She also uses and draws on feminist philosopher, Andrea Nye, and empiricist philosopher, John Dupre, to support her analysis of the logic in the different Greek philosophers. Although discourse analysis had already been proposed for LIS by several authors (e.g. Frohmann 1992, 1994a, 1994b; Budd and Raber 1996), to the best of our knowledge, this was the first time discourse analysis was used as a specific method in KO.

In "Globalisation, Diversity and Information" and "Difference, Culture, and Change: The Untapped Potential of *LCSH*," Hope Olson also introduced postcolonial con-

cepts and methods that have the potential to guide the analysis and the development of alternatives in KO (2000, 20):

> Post-coloniality is helpful in understanding the dispersion of populations and cultures as instigated by the colonialism that infiltrated cultures and set in motion mass migrations between colonised countries and colonial powers. The concepts include exploration of different views of globalization and development as discourses operating between countries and cultures.

In "Difference, Culture, and Change: The Untapped Potential of *LCSH*," Olson introduced Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concept of a "third space" (1994), a place of enunciation that gives a context to a statement as a model for using the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* as a tool for cultural change. In "Classification and Universality: Application and Construction," she uses Foucault's "The Order of Things" for her argument, and also introduces another post-colonial and feminist author in her analysis: Trinh T. Minh-ha. Postcolonialism, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Homi Bhabha's concept of "third space" would be reviewed again in "Transgressive Tools: The Liberating Power of Classification and Its Potential in Activist Visual Representation."

Finally, in one of her last papers as a single author, "Earthly Order and the Oneness of Mysticism: Hugh of Saint Victor and Medieval Classification of Wisdom," identified in our analysis as historicist, Olson conducted a close reading of Hugh of St. Victor's "Didascalicon" in an approach that she acknowledged not to be dissimilar to the "Didascalicon" chapter "Concerning the Method of Expounding a Text." "The method of expounding a text consists of analysis. Analysis takes place through separating into parts or through examination. We analyze through separation into parts when we distinguish from one another things which are mingled together. We analyze by examination when we open up things which are hidden" (D VI, 12, 150, cited in Olson 2010, 125). Close reading is a method that is often associated with poststructuralism and critical theories (see for instance Sarup's analysis of Derridean deconstructive close reading, 1989, 56). While Hope Olson had previously introduced close reading in other articles, such as "Standardization, Objectivity, and User Focus: A Meta–Analysis," the variation of close reading introduced in "Earthly Order and the Oneness of Mysticism: Hugh of Saint Victor and Medieval Classification of Wisdom" is another example of Olson's methodological inquisitiveness and creativity even in the advanced stages of her career.

5.0 Conclusions

Hope Olson has used and introduced several poststructuralist methods and critical theoretical frameworks that are a fundamental part of her legacy in KO. The utility of these research methods and methodologies in her articles was not only to replicate her research but also to inspire and allow future research in the area. The authors that she used and the theories that she brought to KO not only reinforce her arguments in an immediate way but also opened many doors and worlds for the readers and the development of the field in the long term. The methods, techniques and theoretical frameworks that Hope Olson used contributed and continue to contribute to the change of many problems and social injustices of the area. Universality is perhaps a universal problem in LIS. So, even in the further and more unexpected parts of the world, LIS scholars and professionals can relate and find Olson's techniques and theoretical frameworks illuminating. These methods and techniques have been used and will continue being used to ameliorate universality and to eliminate prejudices in standards around the world in the context of the most diverse local circumstances. In Hope Olson's words (2002, 15), "I will suggest techniques for change—not recipes for change suggesting a universal fix, because universality is frequently the barrier to effective and appropriate subject access—but techniques offering a conceptual basis to be adapted to local circumstances."

We have been very pleased to work with her and to learn from her. Her research topics, methodologies and theoretical frameworks have influenced our research. Her contributions in both KO and LIS are significant not only to us but also other scholars. We strongly believe that her works will influence and inspire many scholars in our field.

Note

1. For "bibliocentrism," see Smiraglia (2009; 2015).

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366

Knowl. Org. 43(2016)No.5

D. Martínez-Ávila and J. Beak. Methods, Theoretical Frameworks and Hope for Knowledge Organization

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