

Clare Beghtol: Exploring New Approaches to the Organization of Knowledge

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Howarth, Lynne C. **Clare Beghtol: Exploring New Approaches to the Organization of Knowledge.** *Knowledge Organization*, 37(2), 95-100. 4 references.

ABSTRACT: This issue of *Knowledge Organization* honours Clare Lawton Beghtol, recently retired from teaching at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, Canada. Clare Beghtol's research and theoretical writings have been important in and to the development of the field of knowledge organization, and have exerted a palpable influence, such that Beghtol would appear to align with the definition of "pioneer." In this special issue, academics with various scholarly connections to Beghtol contribute either an examination and critical assessment of a piece of her work that had especially impressed or influenced them in some manner, or a paper of original research reflective of directions also pursued by Beghtol.

1.0 Introduction

This collection of papers, occasioned for an issue of *Knowledge Organization* to honour Clare Lawton Beghtol, was prompted by her recent retirement from teaching at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, Canada. The phrase, "retirement from teaching" is used deliberately, to limit the scope of what occurred June 30, 2009. In fact, even the phrase is misleading as it stands. Professor Emeritus, Clare Beghtol, continues to engage in a program of research that has distinguished her as an international scholar and recognized expert in classification theory. Likewise, with regard to teaching, she has changed only her status, replacing full-time instruction with that of occasional guest lecture and ongoing graduate supervision, thus ensuring students an opportunity to learn from a specialist in knowledge organization, and renowned classificationist.

2.0 Biographical sketch

Born in Lincoln, Nebraska (USA), Beghtol pursued an undergraduate degree in English at the University of Chicago (USA), continuing with graduate studies in American Civilization at Brown University, Providence R.I. (USA). In 1967, she moved to Montréal, Canada, where she taught at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University), and began working in publishing. Moving to Toronto, Canada, in 1969, she was an editor with Copp Clark Publishing for two years, then a freelance editor and writer from 1971 to 1978. In 1979, she entered the Master of Library Science degree program at the University of Toronto, graduating in 1981, and securing a position as Chief Cataloguer/Indexer in the Resource Unit of CBC-TV Current Affairs, where she continued working part-time while also pursuing a doctoral degree at the Faculty of Library and Information Science, University of Toronto. Between 1987 and 1992,



Figure 1. Professor Clare Beghtol

Beghtol was Director of Research at Ketchum Canada Inc.

In 1991 she defended her doctoral dissertation, “The Classification of Fiction: The Development of a System Based on Theoretical Principles,” completed under the supervision of Professor Margaret E. Cockshutt. Beghtol was appointed to a tenure-track position at the Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, in 1993, achieving the rank of Associate Professor in 1998. Between 2002 and 2004, she served as the Faculty’s Associate Dean. Having established an impressive record of scholarship, and a distinctive international reputation in classification theory, and acknowledged for her excellence in teaching and outstanding supervision of her doctoral students, she was promoted to the rank of Full Professor in 2007.

At the end of this introduction is a list of published works additional to those cited in Nancy J. Williamson’s article, “Clare Beghtol: Teacher, Researcher, and Theoretician.” The selected bibliography does not refer to the more than forty unpublished research presentations, including two dozen invited papers given at scholarly or professional venues over the past two decades. Nor does it reflect Beghtol’s many contributions to the scholarly com-

munity, refereeing submissions to international peer-reviewed journals, serving as Acting Editor-in-Chief of *Knowledge Organization* from 1999 to 2000, and regularly planning or chairing sessions on classification research at conferences of the International Society for Knowledge Organization (ISKO), the American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T), and the Canadian Association for Information Science. A brief biographical sketch would be incomplete without noting Beghtol’s appointment to the Universal Decimal Classification Advisory Board, ongoing since 2000, and her leadership roles as, respectively, President of ISKO (1998-2002), and Chair of the ASIS&T Special Interest Group/Classification Research (SIG/CR), 1993-94. Throughout her academic career, she has also maintained memberships in a number of professional associations, including the American Library Association (ALA), and the Canadian Library Association (CLA).

3.0 Context for, and organization of, invited papers

Addressing the question, “Who is a pioneer?,” W. Boyd Rayward (2004, 763) observed that:

One way of trying to find answers to such questions is to identify those who have been in some way important in the development of the field either in terms of their research and theoretical writings or in terms of institutional developments of various kinds for which they were primarily responsible.

He noted further that, “They are pioneers not in the sense of simply being there or being first but because they can be shown to have had a palpable influence on developments that are important from the point of view of those who write about them in the present” (2004, 764). While Clare Beghtol would surely chafe at the very idea of being considered a pioneer, Rayward’s framework would seem not only appropriate, but also applicable. To the extent that her research and theoretical writings have been important in – and to – the development of the field, and have exerted a “palpable influence” (Rayward 2004, 764), Beghtol would appear to align with the definition of “pioneer.”

In assembling this special issue, academics with various scholarly connections to Beghtol were invited to contribute either an examination and critical assessment of a piece of her work that had especially

impressed or influenced them in some manner, or a paper of original research reflective of directions also pursued by the honoree. The first three papers in this special issue, i.e., those penned by Williamson, Kwaśnik, and Jacob, are exemplary of the first type of contribution, while papers by Olson and Craig represent the second approach.

Professor Emeritus, Nancy J. Williamson, a member of Beghtol's PhD thesis committee and long-time colleague, describes and evaluates the trajectory of Beghtol's work in terms of its significance for the development of modern information systems and the extension of classification theory. Her article includes a bibliography of selected publications highlighting Beghtol's research on the determination of "aboutness," concepts of warrant, faceted classification systems, ethical approaches to knowledge organization, and the nature of relationships in classificatory structure and meaning.

Professor Barbara H. Kwaśnik, a co-editor with Beghtol on proceedings of the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 13th ASIS SIG/CR Classification Research Workshops (listed in "Selected Publications", below), and co-winner of the American Society for Information Science "Best SIG Publication Award," for 1993 and 1994, focuses her lens on Beghtol's 1986 article, "Semantic Validity: Concepts of Warrant in Bibliographic Classification Systems." She discusses with compelling clarity how and why the paper continues to merit a "Very good!," with its enduring, timely, and meticulously drawn perspectives of warrant. Professor Elin K. Jacob, who has presented her own distinguished research on classification theory at many of the same ISKO conferences as the honoree, revisits the "particularly strenuous objections" raised by Hjørland and Nicolaisen (2004) to Beghtol's (2003) use of the term "naïve" in association with classification. Jacob argues that Beghtol's distinction between "professional classifications" that support information retrieval, and "naïve" classifications that facilitate knowledge creation, challenged prevailing orthodoxy, extending the research horizon beyond its single-minded and limiting focus on classification schemes used for the retrieval of resources. Jacob advocates for the development of a classification of classifications, and the establishment of a science of classification based on the foundations laid by Beghtol's 2003 article.

Professor Hope Olson's research paper on Hugh of St. Victor's *Didascalicon*, a twelfth-century classification of Wisdom, offers a close reading of his text through its cultural and intellectual context of Me-

dieval Christian mysticism. She argues that Hugh's work stands squarely within an Aristotelian tradition of classificatory structure that has endured to the present day with its characteristic mutually exclusive categories, teleological progression, and hierarchy. In assessing how Hugh's classification embodies deduction, while also reflecting on constructed meaning within its historical and intellectual context, Olson offers a particularly "Beghtolian" approach to this twelfth-century system. Professor Barbara L. Craig, rounds out this collection of papers from an archival perspective. Reminiscent of "Exploring new approaches to the organization of knowledge," the subtitle of this introduction, and a hallmark of Beghtol's research, Craig recounts the history of change to recordkeeping practices in the U.K. Treasury's paper room, from Victorian to post-World War periods. As she describes, from the mid-nineteenth, to the early-twentieth centuries, registration of records occurred when a written communication was received, while classification of registered papers using indexes developed in the 1850s and enhanced in subsequent volumes was done at the stage in the business when records were put away as completed. Expansion of government, and the quadrupling of paper work during the Great War overwhelmed traditional registry practices, necessitating reform and reorganization of the Treasury's paper room in 1920, and uniting the processes of registration and classification. Within a context that might be described as "organizational warrant," Craig's paper reminds us that, like classification systems that are continuously evolving, a registry and its records are always and necessarily a work in progress.

This brings us nicely full circle. In her article, "Exploring New Approaches to the Organization of Knowledge: The Subject Classification of James Duff Brown," Beghtol (2004, 702) observed that, "The creation of present from past is both linear and cyclical: linear because of the passage of time and cyclical because of the potential for rediscovering ideas that were not recognized as seminal in their own time." This present collection of papers from North American scholars in knowledge organization examines both the linear and the cyclical dimensions of Clare Beghtol's oeuvre. While the linearity of her research is readily identifiable, and documented in bibliographies appended to this introduction, as well as to the Williamson paper, the determination of the cyclical, of "the potential for rediscovering ideas that were not recognized as seminal in their own time" requires further consideration, and undoubtedly more time.

Nonetheless, Williamson and Jacob have both focused on what they (and we) might define as seminal ideas from Beghtol's work. Kwaśnik, in re-reading Beghtol's 1986 paper, "Semantic Validity," observes that, "This time, every few sentences stimulated new thoughts – the margins of my copy filled with ideas to put aside and think about some more" – compelling evidence, perhaps, of an experience of "rediscovering ideas that were not recognized as seminal in their own time"? In contextualizing a Medieval classification system, and a Victorian registry, respectively, within their particular cultural milieu, Olson and Craig might be seen to be engaging in analyses of structure – whether classificatory or organizational – reminiscent of Beghtol's perspectives on warrant. Regardless, each of the five papers offers evidence of Beghtol's "palpable influence" on developments in the field, and gives voice to her unwavering commitment to exploring new approaches to the organization of knowledge.

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- Rayward, W. Boyd. 2004. When and why is a pioneer: history and heritage in library and information science. *Library trends* 52n4: 671-82.

Appendix: Selected Publications

The following publications and other scholarly activities are additional to those referenced in Nancy J. Williamson' article, "Clare Beghtol: Teacher, Researcher, and Theoretician," that follows immediately.

Books

- Williamson, Nancy J., and Beghtol, Clare, eds. 2004. *Knowledge organization and classification in international information retrieval*. Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth Press. Also published as *Cataloging & classification quarterly* 37 n1/2.

- Beghtol, Clare. 1994. *The classification of fiction: the development of a system based on theoretical principles*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow.

Book Chapters

- Beghtol, Clare. 2002. Cataloging and knowledge organization. *Encyclopedia of communication and information*, v. 1. Woodbridge, Conn.: Macmillan Reference USA, pp 117-22.

Refereed Journal Articles

- Zins, Chaim, Debons, Anthony, Beghtol, Clare, et al. 2007. Knowledge map of information science: implications for the future of the field. *Brazilian journal of information science* 1n1: 3-29.
- Beghtol, Clare. 2004. The Iiter Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance: collaboration between information specialists and subject specialists in the Arts and Humanities. *Journal of digital information management* 2 (1 March): 4-9.
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- Beghtol, Clare. 2002. A proposed ethical warrant for global knowledge representation and organization systems. *Journal of documentation* 58: 507-32.
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- Morris, Jane, Beghtol, Clare, and Hirst, Graeme. 2003. Term relationships and their contribution to text semantics and information literacy through lexical cohesion. In Peekhaus, William C., and Spiteri, Louise F., eds. *Bridging the digital divide: equalizing access to information and communication technologies: Proceedings of the 31st annual Canadian association for information science/L'association canadienne des sciences de l'information conference 30 May-June 1, 2003 Halifax, Nova Scotia*. Available http://www.cais-acsi.ca/proceedings/2003/Morris_2003.pdf
- Beghtol, Clare. 2003. The Iter Bibliography: international standard subject access to Medieval and Renaissance materials (400-1700) (<http://iter.utoronto.ca>). In McIlwaine, Ia C. ed. *Subject retrieval in a networked environment: Papers presented at an IFLA Satellite Meeting, sponsored by the IFLA Section of Classification and Indexing and the IFLA Section on Information Technology, 14-16 August, 2001, OCLC, Dublin, Ohio, USA*. Munich: K.G. Saur, pp. 74-81.
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