

Studying Reality: The Application of Theory in an Aspect of UK Practice

CAROLINE WILLIAMS

RÉSUMÉ Ce texte contribue aux débats continus sur la nature du lien entre la théorie et la pratique. Il revoit les approches traditionnelles, il considère les plus récentes tant dans le domaine de l'archivistique qu'au-delà, et il conclut que le lien est dynamique. Il offre une étude de cas sur l'analyse d'une application de la théorie de l'évaluation archivistique dans un éventail d'archives britanniques qui révèle que la formation, l'expérience et l'intuition sont tout aussi utiles que la théorie pour certains praticiens, même si les réponses sont souvent colorées par le contexte organisationnel du centre d'archives.

ABSTRACT This paper contributes to the ongoing debate about the nature of the relationship between theory and practice. It reviews traditional approaches, considers more recent ones, both within and beyond the archival domain, and concludes that the relationship is a dynamic one. It offers a case study on the investigation of the application of appraisal theory in a range of UK archives, which demonstrates that training, experience, and intuition are of as much use as theory to some practitioners, although responses are often shaped by the archives' organizational setting.

*"In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice.
In practice there is."*

Yogi Berra, American baseball player, b. 1925

"There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

Kurt Lewin 1890–1947

Introduction

This paper considers the relationship between theory and practice in general, in relation to archives, and more specifically, in relation to appraisal. The professional area of appraisal is, perhaps, one of the most theorized over, and the published output is vast and easily accessible.¹ This paper considers which

1 Albeit "uneven and lopsided," according to Barbara Craig, *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice* (Munich, 2004), p. 113.

appraisal theories are available, who are the theorists, and what makes a theory useful in practice. It then considers why there appears to be evidence that some UK archivists claim to take little or no notice of appraisal theory.² Finally it considers the implications of these findings for educators and the wider profession.

The Spectrum of Theory and Practice

Definitions of theory and practice are always contested, whether within or beyond the archival domain. It is a long time since we thought of theory as the kind characterized by the hard sciences, relying on deduction from certain assumptions to necessary and unchangeable conclusions, remote from practice. Far more usual are the approaches espoused by sociologists that depend on an empirical and inductive approach, where observation leads to *possible* rather than certain, conclusions. These allow the working hypotheses that we encounter daily to be capable of developing a theoretical basis too.

Practice involves the repetition of acts and thoughts, and its products are experience, the potential to generalize, and thus to develop systems and methodologies that can *engender* theories. Theories acquire recognition by tests in practice; practice produces generalizations and theories through the examination of models. Practice validates theory; theory provides a conceptual framework for practice.³ The development of each involves critical thinking and the scrutiny of ideas and practices. Both lead to greater understanding, and the interface between theory and practice is made visible in standards, conceptual and applicable models, comparative studies, and other research output. Indeed theory and practice are so closely linked that some find it unhelpful to seek to define them separately, particularly in continuum-based thinking.

Relationship Between Theorists and Practitioners

There is clearly a symbiotic relationship between theory and practice. However there will always be the potential for tension between theorists and practitioners, in archives as elsewhere. Is it not the job of theorists to theorize and of practitioners to practise? Do they not have different missions, objectives, routes, and constraints? Arguably theorists seek out significant problems or issues that they attempt to understand and explain, and may (or may not) offer solutions to be considered in the light of practice.

Practitioners, on the other hand, do not go looking for problems; they occur as a result of operational practice. They need a tangible and measurable solu-

2 S.L. Mogridge, "What Light can the Practice of Appraisal in Britain Shed on Archival Theory?" (Master's thesis, University of Liverpool, September 2003).

3 T. Frankel, "Of Theory and Practice," *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, vol. 77, no. 5 (2001), p. 12.

tion within a given time-scale, and available models to guide practice. Success or failure can be quite visible. Their experiences, successes, and failures may or may not be fed into the knowledge and experience base of the wider professional canon. Finally practitioners and theorists are likely to view each other as different, as indeed may their audiences. This is quite understandable given that each group will identify with those who share its aims, attitudes, and needs.⁴ Tensions are most noticeable at the extreme ends of the spectrum, where ideas-based theories might encourage creative imaginative thinking but will not offer a useful methodology to practitioners; and where practice-based generalizations based in a narrow practical arena give rise to conclusions of limited interest to theorists.

But that is at the extremes. There is of course, a very broad middle ground in the spectrum of archival enterprise, as there needs to be in any predominantly applied discipline. Here practitioners theorize and theorists practice. It is argued in fact that both theorists and practitioners use similar tools to achieve their ends, and that these are the intellectual tools of theory, practice, experience, and gut (intuition) to solve their problems, even though each uses them differently because their goals and orientations differ.⁵ While discussion here is centred on theory and practice, we shall discover that unless we acknowledge the value of experience and intuition our argument will be incomplete.

Attitudes to Archival Theory

Within the archival domain definitions of theory remain elusive. Terminology continues to be used in different ways and international definitions and perceptions of the relationship of “theory” with “principles” and “concepts,” and of these with and/or within “archival science,” “archival knowledge,” “archival scholarship” and so on, vary.⁶ Archival theory for some is derived from ideas about the nature of the record itself, and for others from the analysis of record-creating processes.⁷ Drawn from this theoretical base are record-keeping methodologies and practices for the creation and capture of authentic and reliable records, and their maintenance and management throughout the record continuum, including archival arrangement, description, and the provision of finding aids.

Attitudes to archival “theory” range between the often-cited extremes of

4 Ibid., pp. 14, 27.

5 Ibid., p. 6.

6 Terry Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” *Archival Science*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March 2001); Trevor Livelton, *Archival Theory, Records and the Public* (Lanham, MD, 1996).

7 Heather MacNeil, “Archival Theory and Practice: Between Two Paradigms,” *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994), p. 7; Catherine Bailey, “From the Top Down: The Practice of Macro-Appraisal,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), p. 45.

Burke and Roberts, to the more recent debate between traditionalists and the postmodernists. Burke argued that “the study of archives will produce a body of basic principles, a system of immutable laws, a litany of theory and dogma,” while Roberts contended that archival theory was “little more than a mode for implementing decisions.”⁸ Both fall in with the non-archival model described above, with Burke at the “top-down deductive” and Roberts at the “working hypothesis” ends of the scale. Recent reiteration of a traditional positivist view that archivists should operate passively in application of a theory that enjoys universal validity unaffected by external contexts is challenged.⁹ The post-modern archivist argues that there is nothing stable, objective, or uncontested about archives, that archivists are not detached, passive, and drifting in their duties but “performers in the drama of memory-making,” and that “the practice of archives is the ritualized implementation of theory, the acting out of the script that archivists have set for themselves.”¹⁰

Perhaps the most fruitful discussion has taken place in the middle ground where it is generally assumed that we neither can nor should aspire to universality and objectivity and that “practitioners now accept that their very existence within their specific cultural, legal and historical environments moulds and affects their judgements.”¹¹ Exponents of this view adopt the empirical sociological approach in developing theory that is limited – or circumscribed – rather than global in its aims. Outcomes may either be creative, conceptual speculations that await testing in practice, or practical systems and methodologies derived from the analysis and generalisation of practice – or somewhere in between.

There are a number of examples of these in the archival domain. Using the definition outlined above, a practice-based theory – developed through an analysis of practice – underpins ISAD(G). This resulted from the observation and analysis of commonalities in pan-national archival descriptive practice and offered a usable methodology derived from it. A conceptual or ideas-based theory is that of the continuum. It enables us to conceive of recordkeeping in a new – virtual – way, offering a conceptual framework within which to develop organizational systems: practical methodologies are consequent upon it whether or not they were a direct intended outcome.

8 Frank G. Burke, “The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States,” *American Archivist*, vol. 44, no. 1 (Winter 1981), p. 45; John Roberts, “Archival Theory: Much Ado about Shelving,” *American Archivist*, vol. 50, no. 1 (Winter 1987), p. 70.

9 Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism,” pp. 3–23.

10 Verne Harris, “Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa,” *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997), pp. 132–141; Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, “Archives, Records and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance,” *Archival Science*, vol. 2, nos. 3–4 (September 2002), pp. 172–73.

11 Preben Mortensen, “The Place of Theory in Archival Practice,” *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999), p. 17.

Relationship between Archival Theory and Practice

No longer then can we agree with Burke then that “One must therefore separate *theoretical* from *practical* when considering whether or not there have been any universal laws abstractly developed in the archival world.”¹² Universal laws seem to have been banished and the interdependence of theory and practice generally accepted. However there is some diversity in the views of archivists about where the *balance* between theory and practice lies.

Some think theory is practice-led. Mortensen argues that theory arises primarily from practice itself rather than from creative thought or abstract theorizing and is “a self-conscious reflection on a particular practice in order to bring to light the presuppositions unconsciously assumed in that practice.”¹³ This would seem to discourage the conceptual ideas-based approach to theory discussed above. Others contend that theory comes first, followed by strategy, methodology, and practice. Eastwood argues: “The starting point is theory, which aims to generalize about the nature of archives in order to set the intellectual framework for method and practice.”¹⁴ Terry Cook, discussing appraisal theory also affirms: “Theories come first. Theory sets forth principles upon which we must agree to proceed. Theory allows us to defend our choices to contemporary critics and to posterity.” In the same paper, however, he emphasizes the complementary nature of theory and practice, and the importance of interaction and cross-fertilization between the two, neither being dependent on, or derivative of, the other.¹⁵

Others consider archival theory and practice as occupying parts of a continuum, linked by methodology. “Archival *theory* ... is the analysis of ideas about the nature of archives, *methodology* the analysis of ideas about how to treat them, and *practice* the outcome of the application of the methodology in particular instances.”¹⁶ This offers a useful model, one that recognizes the reciprocal contribution of each of its constituent elements in the development of ideas-based and practice-based theory.

More satisfactory, if more complex (and non-archival) is the model of the relationship suggested by Gilles Deleuze in a conversation he held with fellow

12 Burke, “The Future Course of Archival Theory,” p. 40.

13 Mortensen, “The Place of Theory in Archival Practice,” p. 17.

14 Terry Eastwood, “What is Archival Theory and Why is it Important?,” *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994), p. 129.

15 Terry Cook, “Archival Appraisal and Collection: Issues, Challenges, New Approaches,” *Special Lecture Series*, University of Maryland and to NARA Staff (21–22 April 1999), pp. 5–6.

16 Heather MacNeil, “Archival Theory and Practice,” p. 7. This claim is also supported by Liverton, *Archival Theory, Records and the Public*, pp. 50–51; Luciana Duranti, “The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory,” *American Archivist*, vol. 57, no. 2 (Spring 1994), p. 330; and Terry Eastwood, “Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies,” *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), p. 233.

philosopher Michel Foucault in 1972. He said that “practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another” and “no theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall.”¹⁷ This idea of theory and practice, of thinking and doing, and making progress incrementally as each bounces off the other has been illustrated by Chris Hurley:

We didn't stay on the ground until a company named Boeing had the design concept for a 767. In the development of winged flight, conceptual thinking and trial-and-error experimentation went hand in hand. What was learned from ballooning and gliding was very much part of the conceptual development undertaken by the Wright Bros. They had to experiment and try-out their ideas (as well as thinking it through) to get a solution: thinking and tinkering at the same time. It was all very iterative. It was only in retrospect that you could say theirs became the right solution at some point.¹⁸

This suggests that theory is always in the process of being made, that neither practice nor theory can develop without interacting, and that theory to be *useful* must be always shifting and changing. Does this approach indicate that progress is made simply through “trial and error” and might one only recognize that you got it right in retrospect?

Such an apparently inseparable relationship between theory and practice might imply that the same people are doing both the theorizing and the practising. Who *are* the theorists? I am assuming that those who *write* about theories, whether ideas-based or practice-based, are theorists. I started out with the contention that ideas-based theorists are more likely to be based in the academy (generating publications) and that those developing practice-based theories were more likely to be solving workplace problems. However it is not quite as cut and dried as that.

Appraisal Theory: What Is It and How Is It Generated and Used?

Appraisal theory refers to the *value* of records; the principles by which some records are judged to be significant and others are not.¹⁹ It has long been held that “our most important and intellectually demanding task as archivists is to make an informed selection of information that will provide the future with a

17 This discussion was recorded 4 March 1972; and was published in a special issue of *L'Arc* 49, pp. 3–10, dedicated to Gilles Deleuze. It was reproduced on the Interactivist Info Exchange, Collaborative Authorship Collective Intelligence website, at: <http://info.interactivist.net/print.pl?sid=03/01/13/0056200> (accessed 5 November 2005).

18 E-mail from Chris Hurley to the Mailing List for Australian Archivists, subject “Digital Archives and Communities,” 21 October 2005.

19 Cook, “Archival Appraisal and Collection,” pp. 4–5.

representative record of human experience in our time.”²⁰ As already noted, appraisal is highly amenable to theorizing, and has an easily accessible published output – predominantly North American. The word “appraisal” is loosely and generously applied however, both to the practical activity of selecting one file over another as well as to the wider discipline that describes and encompasses the entire documentation, selection, and acquisition function that we strive to undertake. In Terry Cook’s words:

Appraisal theory explores in a philosophical sense, the sources or influences upon which archivists base their determination of the “value” in records. Appraisal strategies and methodologies are means whereby such theoretical or philosophical definitions of “value” may be identified and implemented in working reality.²¹

The responsibility that this “important and intellectually demanding task” endows has given rise to much debate. This debate is about:

- whether archivists *should* in fact make appraisal decisions at all, and, if so;
- *why*, for what purpose, they should do so;
- *what* should they appraise; and
- *how* such decisions should be reached.

The first two of these issues, the “whether” and “why” questions, are centred on an intellectual enquiry about the wider purpose of keeping archives. The last two issues, about *what* we appraise and *how* we go about it have given rise to a range of standards and methodologies of direct use in the workplace.

Some argue against the involvement of archivists in making value judgements in selection and appraisal. Jenkinson believed that the purpose of appraisal was to serve record creators and should be undertaken by them alone. More recently Luciana Duranti has argued that making judgements based on the potential “value” of the document is to “renounce impartiality, endorse ideology, and consciously and arbitrarily alter the societal record.”²² However few practitioners can afford to support such a stance.²³ I am therefore starting from the assumption that appraisal is a responsibility we neither can nor should avoid.

Since the general acceptance in the 1960s that archivists need to be

20 Gerald Ham, “The Archival Edge,” *American Archivist*, vol. 38 (January 1975), p. 5.

21 Terry Cook, “Macro-appraisal and Functional Analysis: Documenting Governance Rather than Government,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2004), p. 8.

22 Hilary Jenkinson, *Manual of Archive Administration*, 2d ed. (London, 1965), pp. 149–51; Duranti, “Concept of Appraisal,” p. 344.

23 Jenkinson, *Archive Administration*, p. 150.

involved in documentation and appraisal, a number of theoretical approaches and supporting methodologies have been developed. From the top down these are:

- Proactive, multi-institutional, pan-media documentation strategy approach;
- Macro appraisal: the top-down approach often allied with;
- Functional analysis: analysis based on function rather than organizational structure;
- Pragmatic focussed acquisition strategy – Minnesota approach;
- Record based evidential and informational analysis: the bottom up or micro-appraisal approach.

Documentation strategy developed from the 1970s from the realization firstly that a vast, complex and interconnected “universe of documentation” existed beyond the remit of the archivist, and secondly that the typical institutional approach to appraisal was too narrow and too piecemeal to produce an adequate image of what society was actually like. It is based on the theory that faced with a complex information-rich society and rapidly evolving record-keeping systems, new and systematic documentation techniques would enable archivists to construct a more representative record.²⁴ Thus it was a plan formulated to “assure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity or geographic area” – for example the effect of industrial pollution in Toronto or the response of communities to immigration in Birmingham undertaken through “the mutual effort of many institutions and individuals influencing both the creation of the records themselves and the archival retention of a portion of them.” It involved four activities: choosing or defining a topic to be documented; selecting the advisors and establishing a site for the strategy; structuring the enquiry and examining the form and substance of the available documentation; and selecting and placing the documentation.²⁵ It is “an analytical construct [enabling] us to look at the broader issues of identification and selection of historical records,” and it fully supports an analysis based on the content of the record as well as its provenance and context.²⁶ Early protagonists of the theory were Hans Booms, Head of the German Federal Archives, and Larry Hackman and Joan Warnow Blewitt of the American Institute of Physics; later Helen Willa Samuels of MIT, Richard Cox of the University of Pittsburgh, and others developed and promoted it.

24 Helen Samuels, “Who Controls the Past?,” *American Archivist*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Spring 1986), p. 109; R.J. Cox, *Managing Records as Evidence and Information* (Westport, CT, 2001), p. 118; Hans Booms, “Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity,” *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), p. 28.

25 Samuels, “Who Controls the Past?,” pp. 115–16.

26 R.J. Cox, “Documentation Case Study,” *American Archivist*, vol. 52, no. 2 (Spring 1989), p. 200.

Documentation strategy projects were developed to test this theory, and had some success, for example in projects undertaken in New York and Milwaukee. In the latter, however, problem areas surrounded:

... a lack of intellectual control of the records, as well as an unevenness of education and knowledge in the local archival community; [and] ... inter-institutional cooperation was extremely hard to establish, diminished by other institutional priorities minimizing the macro-efforts represented by the documentation strategy.²⁷

The practitioners' response to documentation initiatives was measured. Terry Abraham of the University of Idaho Library, for example, found it too resource intensive:

... documentation strategies, as a tool for active archival involvement in documentation issues and archival accessioning, do not work in the real world. The universe is too vast, the would-be co-operators each have their own agenda, the eyes of the funding agencies eventually glaze over.²⁸

Cox however maintains that whatever the outcome of specific projects, "the archival documentation strategy has helped the North American archivist to re-think archival appraisal as well as the societal mission of the archivist."²⁹

Macro-appraisal theory, like that of documentation strategy, was a response to changes in the record-keeping environment. It was however less concerned with documenting society through creating and documenting content than with the need, particularly at the level of government, to streamline techniques for the selection of bulky paper records, to accommodate digital records, and to enable consistent selection decisions to be made across different media and disparate creating bodies, based on provenance. It aims to assess value at the government-wide or institution-wide level, and from the top down, through an analysis of organizational functions. A number of models have been developed in different countries, but it is generally based on the theory that archivists need to determine societal values by analyzing three interrelated entities: (1) the creators of records; (2) socio-historical processes (functions, activities, etc. that creators undertake on behalf of citizens); and (3) citizens, clients, customers, etc. on whom both function and structure impinge, and who in turn influence both of the other two. It is about putting

27 R.J. Cox, "Archival Documentation Strategy, a Brief Intellectual History 1984–1994, and Practical Description," *Janus*, no. 2 (1995), pp. 81–82.

28 Terry Abraham, "Documentation Strategies: a Decade (or More) Later" (Paper, SAA annual meeting, August 1995), p. 4.

29 Cox, "Archival Documentation Strategy, a Brief Intellectual History," p. 89.

the focus on the citizen and documenting the citizen's relationship with the state (or the customer's relationship with a corporation, etc).³⁰

This theory was substantially developed by Terry Cook, then of the National Archives of Canada and subsequently as an educator, who continues to write extensively on the subject. For him the goal of macro-appraisal was "the articulation of the most important societal structures, functions, records creators, and record-creating processes, and their interaction, which together form a comprehensive reflection of human experience."³¹ Cook, like Cox and Samuels, takes a broad and strategic view of the archivist's mission; but having crossed the divide from practice to the academy continues to promote workable methodologies.

Macro-appraisal has been adopted and adapted as a model by a number of governments and national archives, for example in Canada, the UK, Australia, and the Netherlands. It is underpinned by a functional analysis approach that identifies significant functions across the whole of government rather than department by department: records supporting those functions will be retained. Since it is functions that are evaluated there is no automatic need to review the records themselves. Records of "insignificant" functions are automatically deselected. It "provides the means to make appraisal decisions without the need for file by file scrutiny or the 'historical perspective' provided by the passage of time."³² The strengths of this approach are its strategic vision and coherence, its ability to reduce redundancy and inconsistency. It accommodates the need for efficiency savings and the needs of digital records. The disadvantages are that on its own it may appear to divorce the appraiser from the user and might therefore disregard possible areas of research; failure to look at the records themselves might lead to informational loss.

Practitioners' responses to macro-appraisal are positive at the government level. In Canada, where it was pioneered, it has been found "for the majority of cases within the context of large, program-oriented organizations such as within the government of Canada, the macroappraisal model provides a sound theory and methodology for the acquisition of a high quality archival record."³³ Discussion continues about its practical application, for example to case-files.³⁴ In the UK the National Archives endorses the theory "to the

30 Cook, "Macro-appraisal and Functional Analysis," p. 8.

31 Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), p. 41.

32 The National Archives, *Appraisal Policy* (2004), section 2.4.3.2, available at: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/selection/ap_praisal.htm (accessed 23 September 2006).

33 Bailey, "From the Top Down," p. 122.

34 Candace Loewen, "Case Files Appraisal at Library and Archives Canada: a Challenge to Mac-

extent that it encourages government-wide ... analysis of functions as a guide to identifying records of value for business and archival purposes."³⁵ In Australia, where the functional approach adopted in April 2000 was developed within the context of the continuum model, an initial evaluation showed that "there is interest in and pressure for a critical mass of functional authorities; the public is interested in appraisal/reappraisal; and developing the monitoring and compliance regime for appraisal work is vital."³⁶ In the Netherlands the PIVOT project, using function as a means of highlighting the context of the creation of the record, found that benefits were inhibited by the amount of resources required for implementation and by the criticisms of researchers concerned about loss of data.³⁷ Other constraints have been found to be "the large amounts of supporting research, potential difficulties in coping with massive and rapid changes to the record creator, and the challenges of dealing with central registry systems that blur the distinction between functions."³⁸

Pragmatic acquisition strategies may be resorted to when repositories do not have the resources to take in the totality of records stated in their acquisition policies. It is all too often the case that, having compiled an acquisition policy, an archival repository uses it as a kind of comfort blanket to defend a passive, thoughtless, and inconsistent approach to its collections.³⁹ Pragmatic policies are based on the idea that it is desirable to acknowledge one's limitations, and proactively to develop an acquisition strategy commensurate with one's resources. It accepts that difficult choices have to be made and the resulting documentation will be partial. It has been articulated most strongly by archivists at the Minnesota Historical Society who in the 1990s had to decide which and what quantity of business archives from the state of Minnesota it would accommodate. With two members of staff dealing with acquisitions, and a state whose historic industries were milling, lumber, and the railroad, and current ones banking, computing, and medical technology, choices had to be set if the future business archive of the state was not to be

roappraisal Theory and Practice" (Paper, Association of Canadian Archivists Conference, Saskatoon, June 2005).

35 Helen Mercer, "The National Archives' Appraisal Policy: Implications for Digital Records," *RecordKeeping* (Winter 2005), p. 37.

36 Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, "The Functional Approach to Appraisal: The Experience of the National Archives of Australia," *Comma*, nos. 1-2 (2002), pp. 57, 59.

37 A. Jonker, "Macro-appraisal in the Netherlands. The First Ten Years: 1991-2001," paper, Estonia, 2002, pp. 6-7.

38 Bailey, "From the Top Down," p. 122.

39 T.L. Ericson, "At the 'Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction': Archivists and Acquisition Development," in Randall Jimerson, ed., *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice* (Chicago, 2000), pp. 177-92; Barbara Reed, "Diverse Influence: An Exploration of Australian Appraisal Practice. Part One," *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 31, no. 1 (May 2003), pp. 63-82.

dictated entirely by chance. The archivists took a macro-appraisal and content analysis approach, analyzed their current holdings of business archives, and consulted a number of scholars.

In brief the method involved ranking businesses by economic impact, extant documentation, identification with the state, and the degree to which the industry was unique to Minnesota, and then creating four levels from Level A (seek to document thoroughly) to Level D (preserve minimal evidence) with a fifth level “Do not collect.” Archivists were intent on achieving a utilitarian approach – “taking actions that result in the greatest good for the greatest number” – based on the notion that what should be acquired is “that body of material that will provide the most use for the widest variety of users through preservation of the smallest quantity of records possible.” In doing so they “worried less about the theory than whether it was an effective way of getting the necessary work done.”⁴⁰

This approach has met with a number of responses: while some theorists have disagreed with the notion of prioritizing patterns of use in determining what should be kept, practitioners, working under similar resource constraints, have welcomed the practical approach. In the UK, archivists in South Lanarkshire, Scotland, saw potential for its application to the selection of business records for a local authority repository as “part of a larger strategy to document the life of the whole community of South Lanarkshire,” arguing that although a very different environment “the discipline and direction offered by applying the techniques of the Minnesota Method should still offer genuine potential to local government archivists.”⁴¹ Another London-based archivist finds it an original, active, positive, and thought-provoking strategy, although commenting that it would need substantial changes to work in his specific business environment, the City of London.⁴²

Finally the **traditional appraisal method** developed by Schellenberg and based on analyses of the records themselves continues to have its supporters. It derives from the theory that while records creators should be responsible for judging the primary values of records of use to the organization, archivists should appraise for secondary values (those of research) and that these are both evidential and informational. Thus appraisal for secondary value is done by assessing both context and content, and in terms of provenance and pertinence. It acknowledges that, especially in judging the value of “informa-

40 Mark Greene, “‘The Surest Proof’: A Utilitarian Approach to Appraisal,” *Archivaria* 48 (Spring 1998), p. 150.

41 Joanna King and Frank Rankin, “From Minnesota to South Lanarkshire: Approaches to Business Archives in a Scottish Local Authority,” *Business Archives: Principle and Practice*, no. 75 (May 1998), pp. 56–57.

42 S.J.H. Freeth, “Business Archives at Guildhall Library: New Developments,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 21, no. 2 (October 2000), p. 188.

tional” content, subjectivity cannot readily be avoided. Those supporting a “content” analysis approach include those advocating documentation strategy, and practitioners such as Frank Boles and Mark Greene.⁴³ Those arguing against appraisal by content, preferring to use evidence and context as benchmarks, include educators such as Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, and Angelica Menne-Haritz.⁴⁴ However practitioners, particularly in collecting archives, continue to find this a useful approach.

Documentation strategy and macro-appraisal are arguably at the “ideas-based” end of the theory spectrum, while pragmatic appraisal strategies such as the Minnesota Method, and record-based evidential and informational analysis are at the “practice-based” end. Documentation strategies were developed by academics and educators based on a specific theory – and while the idea behind it has infected much of our thinking about our role in appraisal it has been less acceptable in practice owing to problems of implementation. Macro-appraisal theory was developed by a combination of those working in national archives, and educators and others in the universities. The theory appears to have been accepted by many practitioners, who have adapted it for their own purposes. It works best for large in-house organizations where a top-down pan-organizational approach is possible. Pragmatic appraisal, explicitly developed from practice rather than theory, was developed by practitioners and has been received with interest by other practitioners, although the original methodology has to be adapted on a case-by-case basis. Since the “theory” behind it depends on individual organizations identifying their own required appraisal outcomes, each needs to develop specific methodologies based on their current resources. Record-based analysis, centred on the perception of evidential and informational values, and developed by Schellenberg, a pragmatist whose theories developed from his own experience, continues to be vastly influential in practice even if the theory behind it has been challenged. Collecting institutions, including historical societies taking in “orphaned” records, do not rely on macro-appraisal or functional analysis, partly because they are explicitly seeking precisely those informational qualities valued by users and partly because it is often easier to identify organizational structures than functions. It is “easy” to apply to small- and medium-sized collections, enables the identification of the relative qualities of specific series, and can be used as a fairly *ad hoc* rule of thumb with or without accompanying series-specific guidelines.

What becomes clear from this is that organizational and social drivers influ-

43 Frank Boles and Mark A. Greene, “Et Tu Schellenberg? Thoughts on the Dagger of American Appraisal Theory,” *American Archivist*, vol. 59, no. 3 (Summer 1996), pp. 298–310.

44 Duranti, “Concept of Appraisal,” pp. 328–44; Eastwood, “Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall”; A. Menne-Haritz, “Appraisal or Documentation: Can We Appraise Archives by Selecting Content?,” *American Archivist*, vol. 57, no. 3 (Summer 1994), pp. 528–42.

ence archivists' responses to specific theories and methodologies and how these are applied. No one generalized appraisal theory will satisfy everyone.

Archival Appraisal in the UK

Barbara Craig calls for a "basic empirical examination of the professional conditions of those who do appraisal" in order to "address the imperfect knowledge about the professional norms and ideals of practising appraisers."⁴⁵ In pursuit of this Craig has undertaken a substantial survey of archival appraisal practice in Canada, investigating the methods used by each professional member of the Association of Canadian Archivists.⁴⁶ Such a comprehensive study has yet to be undertaken in the UK.

However a more limited survey, which analyzed the relationship between the theory and practice of appraisal in a range of UK archival institutions, does contribute to the wider picture. Sian Mogridge, in her Master's dissertation at the University of Liverpool asked: "What light can the practice of appraisal in Britain shed on archival theory?" Mogridge's title seemed to imply that practice is not dependent on theory, indeed it can exist quite happily without it.

Case Study: How Far Do Practitioners in the UK Apply Appraisal Theory?

One archivist in each of ten disparate archive organizations was interviewed.⁴⁷ Each was involved in carrying out some degree of appraisal. Their responses provided a snapshot of the approaches and practices in a range of archives, including the National Archives, three local authorities, two universities, two specialist archives, and two corporate businesses. As indicated in Table 1 these were either *in-house* archives, where the records management function generated organizational archives and the role of the archives was to collect archives internally; or *collecting* archives where acquisition was focussed on external, often orphaned, deposits. In three organizations, both in-house and collecting functions operated.

Interviewees were asked questions that sought to identify:

- the aims of the organization and the centrality and purpose of the appraisal function in relation to those aims;

45 Craig, *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice*, p. 112.

46 Barbara Craig, "Archival Appraisal in Canada – Preliminary Results from a Survey in Canada" (Paper, Association of Canadian Archivists Conference, Montreal, 29 May 2004).

47 Summary, rather than individual responses are indicated here, at the request of participating archives.

Table 1: UK Archives Contributing to Mogridge's Appraisal Survey

Repository	Status	Role
The National Archives	National	In-house
S. Lanarkshire County Council RM	Local authority	In-house and collecting
Liverpool Record Office	Local authority	Collecting
Manuscripts Section, Guildhall Library	Local authority/specialist	Collecting
Glasgow University Archive Service	University	In-house and collecting
Oxford University Archive	University	In-house
Lambeth Palace Library	Specialist	In-house
Institute of Electrical Engineers Archives	Specialist	In-house and collecting
BT Archives	Corporate business	In-house
Boots Company Archive	Corporate business	In-house

- the existence of any organizational or departmental appraisal policy or guidelines;
- how detailed were the rules for appraisal and how strictly they were adhered to;
- the interviewee's role in the organization and their role in the appraisal function;
- the degree to which specific appraisal theory affects practice;
- the degree to which the organization's appraisal policy is unique to its situation;
- any constraints that influence the impact of appraisal;
- the degree of independence of the individual in carrying out appraisal; and
- whether there have been or are proposed any changes in appraisal policy and why.

For the purposes of this paper I focus on their responses to questions about:

- the purpose of appraisal;
- the existence of any organizational or departmental appraisal policy or guidelines; and
- the degree to which specific appraisal theory affected practice.

Purposes of Appraisal

To place the exercise in context, the first findings relate to how these practitioners defined the purposes of appraisal in comparison to those articulated in the literature. Respondents said the purpose of appraisal was to:

- select records that will have a permanent value for the company;
- build a comprehensive but compact picture of the university over time;
- continue to supply the historical record;
- record the business of government;
- comply with appropriate collections policies;
- make sure records are accessible;
- make it easier for researchers;
- maintain maximum information in minimum space;
- minimize the burden of listing second grade material; and
- make the best use of space.⁴⁸

These are the practical and realistic aims of practitioners, whose role is perceived as closely tied to the organizational mission. They are clearly not the conceptual, long-term aims of some theorists for whom the purpose of appraisal includes to:

- document society;
- define society's values;
- provide a representative record of our time;
- shape the future of our jurisdiction's documentary heritage;
- serve the interests of justice.

Existence of Policies and Guidelines

Most, but not all repositories had a formal acquisitions statement or policy. In the UK there is an expectation, expressed in the National Archives *Standard for Record Repositories*, that all collecting repositories will publish such a statement.

The archivist in charge should draw up, and the governing body should approve, a clearly defined statement of collecting policy which indicates the subject areas within which records are sought and acquired, any geographical restrictions affecting the scope of material collected, and the various media for which appropriate storage and access facilities are provided.⁴⁹

In-house archives are less likely to develop such a statement since they do not collect beyond organizational boundaries. Whether or not there is an

48 Mogridge, "What Light can the Practice of Appraisal in Britain Shed on Archival Theory?," p. 59.

49 National Archives, *Standard for Record Repositories*, 2004, Section 3.2, available at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives/framework/repositories.htm> (accessed 23 September 2006).

acquisition policy, all organizations need to manage ongoing records either via retention schedules or other appraisal policies and guidelines. However at the time of the survey, despite the centrality of the appraisal function, none of these organizations had an appraisal policy (two operated with retention schedules), whether they were in-house or collecting archives. Since 2003 the National Archives has published its appraisal policy and Oxford University its selection policy incorporating appraisal guidance, and others have them under development.⁵⁰

Appraisal policies were rare because archivists believed they would have limited value. A number of interviewees gave similar reasons for this view. Firstly it was argued that collections should not be approached with pre-conceived ideas, and that the uniqueness of collections and the variety of situations that occur meant that strict, detailed policies and guidelines were not desirable. More valuable in appraisal was the experience-based knowledge of colleagues: it was more productive to discuss appraisal decisions collaboratively, particularly in small repositories. Archivists described their appraisal practices in some detail: where these were record-based they described such principles as selection of information at the highest hierarchical level to reduce redundancy, and asserting the importance of contextual analysis. A number referred to an indefinable knowledge that is difficult to write down, a kind of intuitive knowledge born of experience, and appraisal practices that are hard to transfer onto paper or articulate in terms of guidelines. There was considerable support for the maintenance of the independence of judgement they currently enjoyed. Most however did acknowledge that systematic yet flexible guidance might lead to a more accountable process and diminish the undesirable effect of any random decision making.

Some acknowledged the difficulties that a lack of guidance could create. One archivist's only colleague had left when she was six weeks into her first job. Others referred to issues of personal inclination: the tendency to dispose of more or less than one's colleagues, changes in mood, the effect on consistency that might occur when working in difficult physical conditions, the problem of being the fourth person to appraise a large collection, without guidance about the actions of predecessors. Some that did not have specific policies however did have guidelines available to aid decision making at the series level for some types of collection. These archivists were all, of necessity, working hands-on with archives. They appraised at series level where possible – but often it was not, and so trawling through the totality of material was necessary. Often material was offered out of context, against a deadline

50 National Archives, *Appraisal Policy*, 2004; Oxford University Archives, *Selection Policy*, 2003, available at: <http://www.oua.ox.ac.uk/staff/selectionpolicy.html> (accessed 23 September 2006).

for removal, with limited resources. As one commented, “appraisal contains a hefty element of manual labour.”⁵¹

The Effect of Appraisal Theory on Practice

All of the archivists interviewed accepted that archival appraisal was a proper function for an archivist to undertake. In terms of the *purpose* of appraisal, archivists based in working environments, supported by a finite amount of resources, are likely to see their appraisal function as derived from the mission and goals of their organization. However, Terry Cook says of this approach:

For archivists merely (and meekly) to do what they think their government sponsors want regarding their own institutional records, or what archivists think will please these sponsors and thus show that archivists are good corporate “players” worthy of continued funding is ... too easy (and too irresponsible) an abdication of the archivist’s cultural mission and societal responsibility.⁵²

Practice-based theorists such as Frank Boles defend practitioners, arguing that “from an individual archivist’s perspective, strategies to document society must be placed in an institutional collecting framework: institutional collection policies must take precedence over a documentation strategy.”⁵³

In answer to the question “Is the repository influenced by appraisal theories?,” most responded that they were not. In general they did not identify their appraisal methodologies with any specific theory, although it was clear that their practices did in fact align with one or more of these, particularly those at the “practical” end of the spectrum. The National Archives has explicitly adapted macro-appraisal to include consultation with users and strategic themes; Glasgow University has experimented with the Minnesota Method, and Guildhall Library and South Lanarkshire had investigated using the methodology, although neither adopted it. Since 2003 Oxford University has adopted a functional analysis approach. Others acknowledged the influence of Schellenberg and the UK Grigg Report. One commented that they kept the good material and discarded the bad.

Findings

Mogridge concluded that:

51 Mogridge, “What Light can the Practice of Appraisal in Britain Shed on Archival Theory?,” p. 70.

52 Cook, “Macro-appraisal and Functional Analysis,” p. 18, fn 8.

53 F. Boles, “Appraisal: The Frank Boles Model,” powerpoint presentation, formerly available (2004) at: <http://www.indiana.edu/~libarch/L516/lecture6-2004.ppt>.

if the ... repositories interviewed are at all representative of appraisal practices among repositories in Britain, then it seems that little attention is being paid to archival theory. Not only do most repositories fail to use theory in practice, but there appears to be a general lack of knowledge about the theories themselves ... What light does this lack of attention shed on the theories themselves? There are two solutions: either archivists are failing to take advantage of useful appraisal theories, or the appraisal theories themselves do not face up successfully to practice. The answer is both are true.⁵⁴

In response to these perceptions: where theories *were* acknowledged and applied, these followed the expected model, notably the macro-appraisal and pragmatic Minnesota Method. Documentation strategy found a home nowhere. In the main there is no theory generally acknowledged to be applicable to, or useful for, the general run of archival repositories. These are often collecting repositories where archivists appraise records on the ground, in more or less detail, in situations where Schellenberg's evidential/informational model would appear to be the most relevant and useful if not explicitly acknowledged. It would appear that the lack of theory is barely felt: individuals were perfectly happy with their personal decision-making processes, and their approaches to appraisal appeared serious and considered.

Does this indicate that, while credible and relevant theories may exist, there is a lack of knowledge of, or interest in, them? Or reflect the fact that there is no appropriate one available? Does it indicate a lack of resources to do anything other than react on an ad hoc basis? Is it because collecting repositories are not called upon to account for their appraisal actions at a strategic level in the same way as government or other in-house organizations? While donors and depositors individually might interest themselves in the results of any appraisal exercise, there may be no collective requirement to defend or explain one's appraisal actions to other stakeholders. Are there any independent performance indicators to demonstrate the validity of this approach?

The Reflective Practitioner

It is clearly possible to develop consistent methodologies on the basis of accepted theory. ISAD(G) and national descriptive standards were successfully developed by extrapolation from practice by practitioners and theorists. No doubt many said at the time that it could not be done – because archives are “unique” and “we do things differently here.” There is scope here for a similar discussion about “doing” appraisal – less about the ideal or as a concept, but in seeking to capture and articulate the irreplaceable knowledge of archivists working in collecting repositories for the benefit of their colleagues

54 Mogridge, “What Light can the Practice of Appraisal in Britain Shed on Archival Theory?,” p. 49.

and successors. Not simply to support a “keep or bin” requirement at the item- or series-level (there are manuals for this) or in a search for universal criteria,⁵⁵ but as an exploration of how approaches have developed over time, and perhaps to prevent the constant re-invention of wheels by new archivists seeking that “intuitive knowledge.” To echo Mortensen,

The choice, then, is not between either theory or practice, but between a practice one engages in blindly, or a practice in which one engages in the realization that the practice is constrained by factors that are not immediately obvious, but which one hopes may at least become clearer.⁵⁶

Perhaps we should bear in mind too that “Appraisal is less an itinerary for a voyage and more a map of concepts for our use in planning many voyages.”⁵⁷

The usual model of theory, methodology, and practice leads us to think that intelligent practice is an *application* of external knowledge/theory *to* our actual decisions. But in the kind of intuitive operation that is clearly involved in appraisal, a kind of knowing is inherent *in* the intelligent, intuitive action itself: it is not imported from outside. As Donald Schon said over twenty years ago:

The workaday life of the professional depends on tacit knowing-in-action. Every competent professional can recognise phenomena ... for which he cannot give a reasonably accurate or complete description. In his day-to-day practice he makes innumerable judgments of quality for which he cannot state adequate criteria, and he displays skills for which he cannot state the rules and procedures. Even when he makes conscious use of research based theories and techniques he is dependent on tacit recognitions, judgments and skilful performances.⁵⁸

The most useful resource for some of the archivists in the case study appeared to be intelligent practice of this kind: tacit and unarticulated, born of experience and intuition. There is nothing new here. The application of intuition and experience as the basis of appraisal practice has long been recognized by practitioners, even if theorists have tended to deplore it. In an article written in 1972 and translated into English in 1987, Hans Booms described how German archivists in the early twentieth century appraised for historical evidence on the basis of *verstehen* or intuitive understanding, and experience.

55 R.J. Cox, “The Documentation Strategy and Archival Appraisal Principles: A Different Perspective,” in Jimerson, ed., *American Archival Studies*, pp. 211–41.

56 Mortensen, “The Place of Theory in Archival Practice,” p. 17.

57 Craig, *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice*, p. 3.

58 Donald A. Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner* (New York, 1983), pp. 49–50.

This, he says, provided the justification of the appraisal principle of *Fingerspitzengefühl*, “finger-tip-feeling” or subtle intuition that grew out of a “gift for sensitivity ... human maturity ... and the ability to empathize with historical events.” It was deliberately anti-theoretical and accorded with the view that “detailed regulations and systems for determining what should be destroyed and what should be preserved are of no value; as is generally the case, theory is worthless or inferior – only actual practice is decisive.”⁵⁹

Confidence in *Fingerspitzengefühl* as a methodology ebbed as changing political and social conditions in Germany after the First World War led to insecurity, scepticism, and doubt. But given the findings of current case studies there would still appear to be a case for exploring and exploiting tacit knowledge as one of a range of tools in the archivist’s appraisal kit-bag.

Do educators need to discover how to impart to their students – and should practitioners themselves explore – ways of capturing and profiting from the tacit knowledge of individual professionals? Should educators and practitioners try more consciously to employ the methods used in corporate knowledge management? These claim that organizations that can identify and link experts able to share tacit knowledge benefit as a result, generating higher quality solutions more quickly and cheaply. One recognized way of doing this is by developing communities of practice. These are informal networks encouraged in organizations so that practitioners learn to work more effectively, understand work more deeply, and develop a sense of common purpose and a desire to share work-related knowledge and experience. This deliberate capture of informal interactions about specific issues or problems aims to enable the expansion of the range of reusable knowledge. In theory at least, knowing what processes have worked best, for which types of issues, which experienced practitioners were involved, and what pitfalls were/were not avoided means that organizations can tap into such time-saving relevant information next time round. “When done properly, capturing and sharing knowledge becomes an effortless by-product of the normal issue resolution dialogue.”⁶⁰ Such strategies could offer a model for archivists within and beyond organizations too.

One experienced practitioner in the case study, who was exposed to theory while undertaking graduate training, but now explicitly values experience above theory-chasing activities, believes there is another element involved.

59 Hans Booms, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Source,” trans. Hermina Joldersma and Richard Klumpenhouwer, *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 84–86. I thank Terry Cook for pointing this out.

60 A. Lye, “How do you capture tacit knowledge? Customer Relations Management,” available at: <http://www.destinationcrm.com/articles/default.asp?ArticleID=3399> (accessed on 20 November 2005).

Intelligent practice is not simply experience and intuition, but the difference between a trained and an untrained mind. *Professional training* provides common ground between the newly-qualified novice and the older hands, and shapes the novice's absorption of experience.⁶¹

Clearly then, despite our intuitive practitioners, appraisal needs to be undertaken on a basis of explicit knowledge as well as tacit "knowing in action." The trained mind will have acquired at least a knowledge of contextual analysis, "business processes ... administrative functions ... the needs and uses for records and ... of the responsibilities and rights which are manifest or latent in [them] records"⁶² before gaining the experience that validates such knowledge. All those in the case study will have acquired a Master's qualification, yet appraisal theory was not viewed as essential to their actions. There must be many more practitioners "out there" with no archival education and training who are appraising without even the benefit of a "trained mind," let alone the application of any theory.

Effect on Relationship between Practitioners, Professional Associations, and Educators

As discussed earlier, at the extremes of theory and practice there is always a risk that theorists might become entirely separate from practice, and where practitioners do not collaborate with theorists to find solutions, they are likely to develop their methodologies independently. In the case study it appears that theories taught in the programs and available in the literature are often not implemented by practitioners. Or, at the very least, as training becomes more distant, theory becomes less explicitly acknowledged. This must be of concern to those responsible for the content of archival education programs and the professional associations that support them. How do educators measure in practice the impact of what they teach? Discussions about the balance in archival education programs between exposure to theory and practice, and who decides the content of curricula, are of long-standing and cannot be revisited here. Two statements illustrate opposing stances. In 1996 Frank Boles and Mark Greene said "the test of a theory is not in its pedigree but its utility."⁶³ Two years later Richard Cox asserted: "I believe that the future of graduate archival education rests primarily with what graduate archival educators deem it to be."⁶⁴ One prioritizes the needs of practice; the other emphasizes

61 S. Freeth, Guildhall Library, e-mail message 23 June 2005.

62 Craig, *Archival Appraisal: Theory and Practice*, p. 130.

63 Boles and Greene, "Et tu Schellenberg?," p. 309.

64 Richard J. Cox, "The Society of American Archivists and Graduate Education: Meeting at the Crossroads" (Paper, Society of American Archivists pre-conference session, December 1998),

the role of the academy. However if we recognize that an essential component of “professional” status is the knowledge and understanding of a body of theory that is useful, and used, in practice we must be prepared to tussle eternally with the implications of these apparently opposing statements.

The balance between theory and practice in what constitutes required professional knowledge is integral too to the debate about our status as a profession. Traditional depictions of professions include those of the “trait” model and the “functional” model. The first contends that essential traits or features of a profession are skills based on theoretical knowledge, and the provision of training and education; those of the second define professional behaviour in terms of four essential attributes, one of which is a “high degree of generalised and systematic knowledge.”⁶⁵ These models of professions are less fashionable now because of the rigidity they impose, but theoretical knowledge will surely remain central to any definition.

It is clear that the identity and role of professions are changing, and their status weakening as vocational courses in universities expand, and as commercial approaches to management undermine professional ideals and habits of disinterested service and monopolistic practice.⁶⁶ This does not bode well for professional associations that aspire to some kind of control over the education of their practitioners. All applied disciplines have to develop relationships between the university and the practising profession. This relationship rests on such variables as the status of the discipline within the institution, the relationships between academics and practitioners, and the connection between theory and practice. For example, undergraduate pharmacy programs are academically strong as a discipline, but weak on the educator–practitioner relationship, while graduate nursing programs have a weak academic profile but have strong control of graduate practice.⁶⁷

Where does the archival profession fit here? National models vary, but in general our academic status is improving as educators take on doctoral responsibilities, and generate research funding and publications. The academic–practitioner relationship is good, the relationship between theory and practice is close, and educators have built up a body of professional knowledge. This seems more of a partnership model than the disconnection of pharmacy, or the control of graduate nursing.

Archival educators and practitioners have shared values and goals, yet a

p. 7, available at: <http://www2.sis.pitt.edu/~gaeconf/CoxPositionPaper.html> (accessed 23 September 2006).

65 Terence J. Johnson, *Professions and Power* (London, 1972), pp. 23, 33.

66 Ian Glover and Mike Hughes, *Professions at Bay* (Ashgate, 2000), p. 19.

67 Tony Becher, “Professional Education in a Comparative Context,” in Rolf Torstendahl and Michael Burrage, eds., *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy* (London, 1990), pp. 134–150.

relationship of “dynamic tension.”⁶⁸ Do we educators see ourselves primarily as academics, like the pharmacists, or as occupying “the middle ground, seeking to maintain a dual role as practically oriented academics and as academically oriented practitioners”?⁶⁹ This difficult balancing act is increasingly likely to result in satisfying faculty-led targets for research and publication at the expense of practice-driven agenda. On the other hand, in common with other applied disciplines, as students progress through courses they:

... identify themselves increasingly as apprentice practitioners, and become less receptive to activities which are not clearly related to practice. Their responses serve to mark the contrasts between acquiring a conceptual framework relevant to the profession (the main desiderata [*sic*] of trainers) and learning how to perform like a professional (the main desideratum of practitioners).⁷⁰

This study reinforces earlier statements about the different missions, objectives, routes, and constraints of theorists (often educators in our case) and practitioners. It underlines the assertion that although educators and practitioners “share a substantial area of professional knowledge, the relative emphases they place in its theoretical and practical elements are predictably dissimilar.”⁷¹

Conclusion

It is certain that the epistemological status of theory in our particular field tends towards that of the middle range described by Merton and other sociologists, and that we use it to develop ideas-based and practice-based theories. We are also involved in developing theoretical constructs around practical models, methodologies, and taxonomies. We have good channels of communication between and among theorists and practitioners – neither of which is in any case a discrete or exclusive group. Both general and archival literature continually assert that theory must be relevant to practice, and that the more “theory is identified by its derivation from, or relevance to the key issues of practice, the easier it is to bridge the gap between the two.”⁷² For example “theory in the archivist’s hands is only so good as it serves the work,”⁷³ and “[t]heory arises primarily from practice, and not from theory itself, not primarily from reflection on other theories, but reflection on ways of doing.”⁷⁴

68 Paul Conway, “Archival Education and the Need for Full-Time Faculty,” *American Archivist*, vol. 51, no. 3 (Summer 1988), p. 258.

69 Becher, “Professional Education in a Comparative Context,” p. 148.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

71 *Ibid.*

72 *Ibid.*, p. 145.

73 Terry Eastwood, “Toward a Social Theory of Appraisal,” in Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination*, p. 72; and Boles and Greene, “Et tu Schellenberg?,” p. 309, fn 23.

74 Mortensen, “The Place of Theory in Archival Practice,” p. 17.

If this is the case, the case study makes it clear that we still have some way to go before understanding and fully exploiting the interface between theory and practice, and their mutual incremental and iterative processes and relationships. It is also clear that we are not paying enough attention to the contribution made to theory and practice by experience and intuition, and the useful capture of these elements. Theories that endure, whether conceptual or applied, ideas- or practice-based, are built on cumulative experience. However we should continue to create, debate, and challenge speculative and apparently “useless” theory, and indeed have the honesty to admit that some of our practices are simply not grounded in any at all.

