

The RIASEC profile of foreign language teachers

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Abstract

Vocational choice appears to crystallize during adolescence and one's career aspirations begin to take shape later. Over 40 years ago Holland studied incoming freshman to match vocational aspirations to vocational preference profiles. Individuals seeking to become foreign language teachers were assigned a Social, Artistic, Enterprising vocational code. However, longitudinal studies were not conducted to verify if these people ever entered the teaching profession. The present study sought to determine a Holland code for inservice foreign language educators. Data analysis confirms a stable Holland profile and his earlier findings as well as highlighting interesting differences among world language educators. This study holds implications for school counselors and recruiters of prospective language teachers during a time of critical shortage.

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1. Introduction

Teaching appears to be “one of those rare jobs in which one's work is wrapped up in one's personality” (WELL Newsletter for Wellness, 2000, p. 3) and the choice of one's occupation is an expressive act that reflects a person's motivation, knowledge, personality, and ability (Holland, 1997). For many, an occupation represents a way of life, an environment rather than a set of isolated work functions or skills. Holland (1997) suggests that people seek out environments that provide them with the opportunities to use their talents and share their values and attitudes with others who are similar to them in the ideal.

Holland's theory places teachers in the Social domain. According to theory (1997), Social individuals prefer activities that involve working with people that educate, inform, cure, or enlighten and are characterized by people who enjoy helping others and engaging in social activities. More than four decades ago, Holland conducted a study of over 23,078 college freshman and matched participants' vocational aspirations to their vocational preference profile. He reported that of the entire sample, only 17 men and 117 women aspired to become foreign language (FL) teachers and that this group was found to have a Social, Artistic, and Enterprising

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profile (Holland, 1966). Interestingly, of such as large sample of undergraduates, a small number aspired to become FL educators, which is significant since there is currently a shortage of FL teachers nationally (American Association for Employment in Education, 2006). Nevertheless, Holland's finding was never tested empirically with employed FL educators.

In fact, many of Holland's codes found in the *Dictionary of Occupational Codes* (Gottfredson & Holland, 1996) are made from expert judgments and in an effort to understand FL teachers' vocational identity, the author conducted an empirical study of inservice FL educators. The following section of this report discussed the methods. Later, the results from the investigation and the discussion and conclusion are presented.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

During the 2005–2006 academic year, each school district ($N = 48$) in a western state was contacted to collect names and contact information for every employed certified inservice FL teacher, approximately 150 educators. For this study, women ($n = 63$) outnumbered men ($n = 19$) and the sample was primarily Caucasian (74%) followed by Latino/a (24%). The majority of the subjects (59%) reported having only a bachelor's degree and three self-reported having their doctorates. Eighty-eight percent reported teaching either Spanish or French and more than 50% ($n = 50$) were veteran teachers (6+ years of experience).

In terms of gender, females were on average 43-year-old Caucasian Spanish teachers who have taught FL for almost 13 years and have studied abroad for 12 months. Thirty-nine percent of this group reported having a graduate degree with an education major and an additional 40.3% reported majoring in FL education specifically. Male subjects were found to be similar in terms of ethnicity and age; however, only half reported having graduate degrees. Almost three-quarters of the males were Caucasian and reported having taught FL for an average of 14 years, slightly above the 12 years reported by females. Men were found to teach German (22%) and Spanish (56%) predominantly. Overall, the sample's demographics accurately represent this state's demographics and national teacher demographics as well since the majority of public school teachers are White and approximately three out of four are female (Latham, Gitomer, & Ziomek, 1999).

2.2. Research instrument

The Self-Directed Search Form R™ (SDS, Holland, 2000a) was designed for adolescents and adults to help them make career and education choices that are aligned with people's interests and abilities. This instrument has been tested over the years with a variety of groups to verify its integrity, especially in terms of gender and ethnic biases. When investigating possible differences between gender and various ethnic groups, the SDS Form R has been found to be consistent with the theoretical predictions (Benninger & Walsh, 1980; Fishburne & Walsh, 1976; Holland, 1986; Holland, Powell, & Fritzsche, 1994a; Ward & Walsh, 1981).

Form R is composed of six subscales that measure a person's interests. The six subscales are classified as Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. According to theory (Gottfredson & Holland, 1996), Realistic types of individuals are hands-on and practical. Investigative individuals tend to be analytical and focus on finding explanations of physical and social realities. Artistic individuals are expressive and favor creative activities whereas Social individuals provide help and counseling and focus on social interactions. Enterprising individuals focus on persuasion in business contexts and Conventional individuals focus on establishing orderly routines such as in clerical work.

In order to determine the participants' interest profile, the researcher totals each classification ($50 \times 6 = 300$ survey items) and assigns a number to each. A participant's interest profile is determined by ordering the totals for each of the subscales from the highest (50 maximum) to the lowest (0 minimum). The first three classifications are reported here since warns that "extremely large samples are needed" for empirical studies using all six classifications" (Holland, 1997, p. 32).

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