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# The RIASEC Profile of Foreign Language Teachers

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## **Introduction**

Teaching appears to be “one of those rare jobs in which one’s work is wrapped up in one’s personality” (WELL, 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 profile (Holland, 1966). Interestingly, of such a 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.

## **Method**

### *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).

*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 x 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).

*Theoretical notions*

Holland graphically represented the six domains of the SDS using a hexagonal model that defines the degree of consistency in an individual's personality pattern. The two highest scale scores on the SDS inventory, can be labeled as having one of three levels of consistency: profile patterns compiled from the SDS where a person holds adjacent points on the hexagon are deemed most consistent (that is, some pairs are more closely related than others). For example a person with the two highest scale scores as Social and Artistic is consistent according to the theory. Contrarily, profile patterns composed on opposite sides of the hexagon are least consistent, such as Realistic and Social. Patterns following other types are said to have an intermediate level of consistency. Additionally, the hexagon defines the degrees of congruence between person and environment. The most congruent situation for an Artistic person would be within an Artistic environment. The hexagon can be used to determine degrees of consistency and congruence and to predict the expected outcomes related to job satisfaction, achievement, and change in jobs (Holland, 1997). For a more detailed understanding, see Holland, 1997.

Of particular interest for this study are gender differences. Gender appears to be strongly associated with the Realistic and Social scales, where women are more likely to have higher summary scores on Social interests and men score higher on Realistic interests (Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell, 1994b). Holland et al. (1994b) reported that women were more likely to have a Social designation as their main type 45.7% of the time where males were found to be Social only 10.5%.

### *Procedures*

The researcher solicited participation at the state's annual FL educator meeting as well contacting FL educators by phone, emails, and letters. Participants (n = 82) were given a packet containing a consent form, a cover letter, the SDS and the Occupations Finder booklet (Holland,

2000b), and a demographics sheet, and a postage-paid return envelope as needed. Overall, three surveys and demographic sheets were not filled out completely, so those participants were contacted and requested to complete the missing data points. Following data entry, the participants were contacted via email to give them their individual vocational profiles by which they could find specific information about their vocational profile using the Occupations Finder booklet. Once the 82 SDS booklets were gathered, the researcher conducted sample size analysis and determined that the sample size was adequate for this study.

## Results

The SDS data set was analyzed after an outside reviewer verified the accuracy of entered data points. The internal consistency of the instrument was evaluated by computing a Cronbach's Alpha for each subscale. Values for the reliability coefficients were: Realistic (.93), Investigative (.89), Artistic (.89), Social (.86), Enterprising (.89), and Conventional (.92), indicating satisfactory instrument reliability. These coefficients were found to be consistent with other studies using the SDS (Holland et al., 1994b).

Next, the investigator calculated means and standard deviations for each subscale without disaggregating the data into groupings such as gender and ethnicity to determine an interest profile of the entire sample. The interest profile was Social ( $M = 35.28$ ,  $SD = 7.02$ ), Artistic ( $M = 25.85$ ,  $SD = 10.30$ ), and Enterprising ( $M = 25.18$ ,  $SD = 9.59$ ). The Conventional domain ranked fourth by a close margin ( $M = 24.33$ ,  $SD = 10.56$ ), whereas the Investigative ( $M = 19.84$ ,  $SD = 9.37$ ) and Realistic ( $M = 18.41$ ,  $SD = 11.14$ ) domains were ranked last respectively.

In order to better understand the stability of this profile, the findings were juxtaposed against the theory. Holland et al. (1994b) posit that a differentiation of eight points, on a scale from zero to 50, increases the stability of the interest profile. For this group of educators, the

differentiation between the first and second profile domain was 9.43, which indicated a strong differentiated profile for the first domain. Even though the second and third domain types are separated by less than one point (.67), the overall total differentiation of 16.87 indicated a strong differentiated profile for the sample. A second theoretical juxtaposition revealed that the Social, Artistic, Enterprising code was congruent when comparing the subjects' overall code to Holland's RIASEC hexagonal model. The sample's Holland code was located in an adjacent orientation to one another, which suggests that these people are more predictable in terms of vocational preference.

Next, the researcher investigated differences among the different independent variables. The Holland code for female participants, Social ( $M = 36.25$ ,  $SD = 6.77$ ), Artistic ( $M = 25.76$ ,  $SD = 10.79$ ), and Enterprising ( $M = 25.03$ ,  $SD = 9.40$ ), was a more highly differentiated and stable profile than that of the male participants who had a Social ( $M = 31.74$ ,  $SD = 6.52$ ), Realistic ( $M = 31.00$ ,  $SD = 11.12$ ), and Artistic ( $M = 26.15$ ,  $SD = 8.83$ ) profile. Noting such differences between the genders, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the six subscales for gender differences after verifications that the data met the statistical assumptions necessary to conduct such tests.

Two of the six subscales showed significant differences for gender. The ANOVA for the Realistic scale was significant,  $F(1,78) = 54.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .41$ . The ANOVA for the Social scale was significant,  $F(1,78) = 5.52$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ . The strength of the relationship between the two subscales, as addressed by the  $\eta^2$ , was large, accounting for 48% of the variance of the dependent variable.

Following the ANOVA tests, the researcher investigated gender differences from an even different perspective by analyzing the top-three domains chosen by each gender using simple

rank orders. Table 1 shows that for males, Realistic interests prevailed in the first domain position (45%) where females appeared most interested in Social interests (66%). Interestingly, men's Social interests ranked second (61%) and women's second domain was almost tied between the Artistic (24%) and Conventional (23%) domains.

Table 1

	1 <sup>st</sup>		2 <sup>nd</sup>		3 <sup>rd</sup>	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
R	.45	.02	.17	.00	.06	.08
I	.11	.03	.05	.13	.11	.07
A	.11	.15	.00	.24	.50	.19
S	.22	.66	.61	.24	.05	.08
E	.11	.02	.00	.16	.17	.40
C	.00	.12	.17	.23	.11	.18

Turning to ethnicity, the Holland code for the Caucasians in the sample was Social ( $M = 35.00$ ,  $SD = 7.39$ ), Artistic ( $M = 26.73$ ,  $SD = 10.16$ ), and Enterprising ( $M = 24.30$ ,  $SD = 9.97$ ), whereas Latino/as participants, the second largest ethnic group in the sample, pertained to the Social ( $M = 35.30$ ,  $SD = 5.48$ ), Conventional ( $M = 26.55$ ,  $SD = 9.61$ ), and Enterprising ( $M = 26.20$ ,  $SD = 7.48$ ) classification. The two African Americans in the study were found to have distinctly different Holland codes: one Conventional, Artistic, and Social and one Social, Artistic, and Enterprising code. Among the three ethnic groups, the Caucasians and Latino/as had stable and highly differentiated profiles as dictated by theory.

After determining group profiles, the researcher computed correlation coefficients for the six SDS subscales to substantiate further the stability of the profiles. Analysis revealed that eight out of the 15 correlations were statistically significant. Of six possible combinations along adjacent corners, four consistent pairs were correlated. Indicating an intermediate level of consistency, three non-adjacent pairs were correlated. And, only one pairing (Social and



Realistic) was negatively correlated indicating inconsistency among the profile. The sample's profile, situated adjacently along the hexagon, the Social, Artistic, and Enterprising domains were not only highly correlated but statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) too.

The final analysis focused on determining the percentage of participants having the same Holland code and iterations of that Holland code. Twenty-five percent of the sample had Holland profiles using iterations of the three domains (SAE, SEA, ASE, ESA, etc) and seven subjects (all females) belonged to this group without iteration. Interestingly, of the 20 subjects classified by these profile iterations, only one was male with an Enterprising, Social, and Artistic profile. The next largest group (all females) belonged to the Social, Enterprising and Conventional classification ( $n = 6$ ) in ordinal fashion and another eight participants were categorized with this Holland code by using iterations of the three domains. Male participants (28%) pertained to Realistic, Social, and Artistic profile and its iterations. Only one female belonged to this group with a Realistic, Artistic, and Social classification.

## **Discussion**

The overall Holland code established for this sample (Social, Artistic, Enterprising) is consistent with Holland's code established earlier with a sample of students indicating vocational preference through career aspirations (Holland, 1966). Further, the stability of the profile, a posited theoretically, revealed that the sample's collective profile was highly differentiated. According to Holland et al. (1994a), a differentiation of eight points for the first two subscales, on a scale from zero to 50, increases the stability of the interest profile. For this group of educators, the differentiation between the first and second subscale was 9.43, which indicated a strong differentiated profile for the first domain. Additionally, total differentiation for the six domains was 16.87, suggesting a strong overall differentiated profile.

Interestingly, even though the second (Artistic) and third domain (Enterprising) subscales were separated by less than one point (.67), the Social, Artistic, Enterprising classification is considered a reliable Holland code since profile patterns compiled from adjacent points on the hexagon are most consistent (Holland, 1997). Adding to the constancy of this finding, correlational analyses revealed high correlations among the Social, Artistic, Enterprising domains, adding further support to the accuracy of this classification and Holland's theory.

Furthermore, there appears to be congruency between the workplace and the participants in this study, a central tenant to Holland's theory (1997). Teachers work in schools, which tend to be clearly defined as social environmental domains (Holland, 1997). Finally, the SDS behaved in a reliable manner. Measures of internal consistency for the six subscales were high (0.86-0.93) and within the range of those reported by Holland et al. (1994b). Similarly, correlations among the six domains were comparable.

Additionally, this research has practical implications for school counselors and teacher recruiters. In general, "almost a third of America's teachers leave the field sometime during their first three years of teaching, and almost half leave after five years" (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2002, p. 4) and the attrition rate for FL educators is higher than the attrition rate of other content area specialties (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2006; Konanc, 1996). Clearly, the SDS is a solid career guidance instrument and perhaps by using it for admission to teacher education programs, FL teacher attrition rates can be reduced. Further, the SDS can help offer individuals more insight into their abilities and people can take begin to critically analyze their vocational aspirations before entering a profession. In fact, this research has broad implications not only for education, but other professions as well.

In light of the confirmation of the vocational code for FL educators, the researcher calls for more research to confirm expert judgments regarding Holland codes for more professions. Clearly, differences in terms of gender and ethnicity appear and require further investigation. Holland's theory and instrument appear valid and reliable for such inquiries and career guidance.

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