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Optimal Moment in Adolescent Personality Development for Teacher Recruitment

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Title: Optimal moment in adolescent personality development for teacher recruitment

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During a recent presentation at Georgia's Future Education Association FEAST conference, I asked students how they feel on a scale from 1 (low stress) to 10 (extremely stressful) when mom or dad asks them what they want to do with their lives professionally. While several confident students replied with one or two, others answered with ratings such as nine or 10. A few even replied with 12!

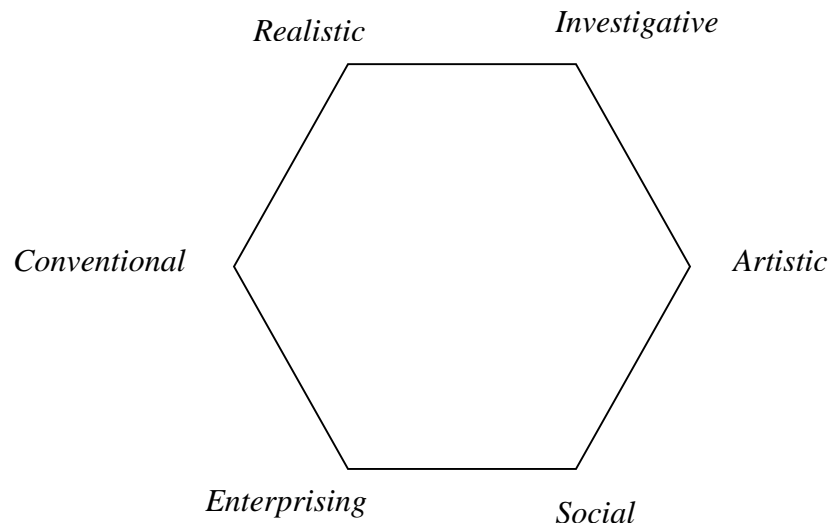
The selection of a career can be a stressful time in a child's life and this process begins early. As a child develops between birth to 14 years of age, not only do dramatic changes take place both physically and psychologically, so does the foundation for self-concept. Among other things, a child's self-concept helps shape future career choices. When children begin to investigate vocational choices, they tend to act in relation to their understanding of themselves while gaining knowledge of the requirements and work activities of different occupations. Super (1990) suggests that individuals begin to crystallize vocational preference between the ages of 14 and 18, yet many students are still investigating career choices after age 18. The following research offers evidence that vocational interests seem to surge early in the high school experience. The research discussed here helps pinpoint adolescents' age when vocational interests appear to become markedly refined.

Using vocational preference inventories to improve teacher recruitment practices

In an effort to investigate adolescents' journey toward vocational resolution as well as studying the personality profile of future educators, I developed a research study focused on students participating in Georgia's Future Educators Association using a popular vocational

preference inventory, the *Self-Directed Search Form R* (Holland, 1994), which has been very influential in vocational counseling for decades with adolescents and adults alike. The *Self-Directed Search (SDS)* is based on John Holland's model (1997) that suggests that most people can be categorized as one of six personality types and each of the personality types are best suited to different careers. Holland proposed six basic personality types (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional) and then identified careers for each type. Additionally, he proposed six basic workplace environments for each personality type using the same domain name for each. To graphically illustrate the idea, Holland uses a hexagonal model (Figure 1) to show the relationship among six domains for both a person's interests and the workplace environment.

Figure 1. Holland Hexagon (Holland, 1997).



Opposite points on the hexagon indicate opposing interests and environments. To find vocational stability and happiness, people's interests should be matched to their vocational selection. Holland purports that people have particular abilities, competencies, and interests and different vocations favor people that have specific abilities, competencies and interests. For example, the Realistic and Social domains are viewed as having opposite interests whereas the Realistic and Investigative are more similar. Holland theorizes that people search for environments in which to exercise their talents, express their attitudes, and take on agreeable roles. For job satisfaction to occur, an individual's interests should be found in the same domain as the workplace environment. That is, a person with Social interests should work in a Social workplace in order to find vocational satisfaction and job stability. Typically, only the three highest rated domains are used to assess one's vocational personality. If the first two highest rated domains are found not to be adjacent along the hexagon, the Holland code is seen as less consistent and stable, indicating a possible lack of congruence among personality and the workplace environment.

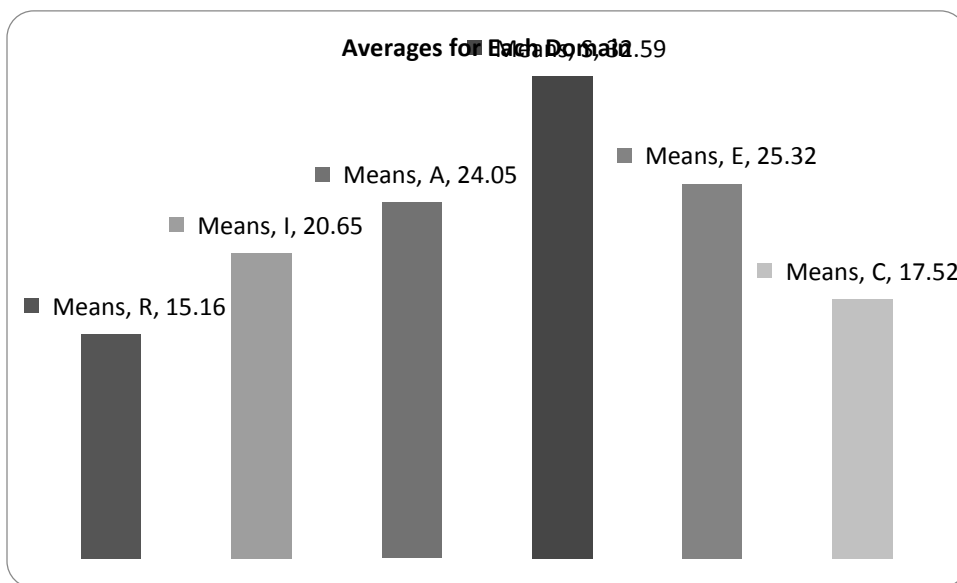
Striking vocational similarity

Starting during the 2007-2008 academic year under university guidelines for research, I worked with 262 students participating in Georgia's Future Educators Association to determine their vocational personality using the *SDS*. At state conferences and individual chapter's meetings I administered the *SDS* to students whose ages ranged from 13 to 19 years. Average age of the research group was 16.47 years of age and the group was primarily Caucasian (62%) and African American (22%) with girls outnumbering boys four to one. The participants found the *SDS* easy to take (approximately 15-20 minutes) because students simply mark if they

like/dislike certain activities, have/do not have certain competencies, and offer a self-rating of different skills.

In order to determine the interest profile (a.k.a Holland code), an individual totals the number of items for each of the six domains. An individual's interest profile is determined by rank ordering the totals for the six subscales from the highest (50 points maximum) to the lowest (0 points minimum). The interest profile is determined by ranking the three highest domains. Interestingly, the sample's interest profile consisted of Social, Enterprising, and Artistic individuals (See Chart 1).

Chart 1.



The results confirmed earlier findings from studies using the *SDS* which have consistently classified teachers and schools in the Social domain and also show the strong reliability of the instrument. Also, the two highest rated domains that constitute the Holland code (Social and Enterprising) are found along adjacent sides of the Holland hexagon, which adds stability to the group's vocational identity. Moreover, the two highest rated domains are highly differentiated.

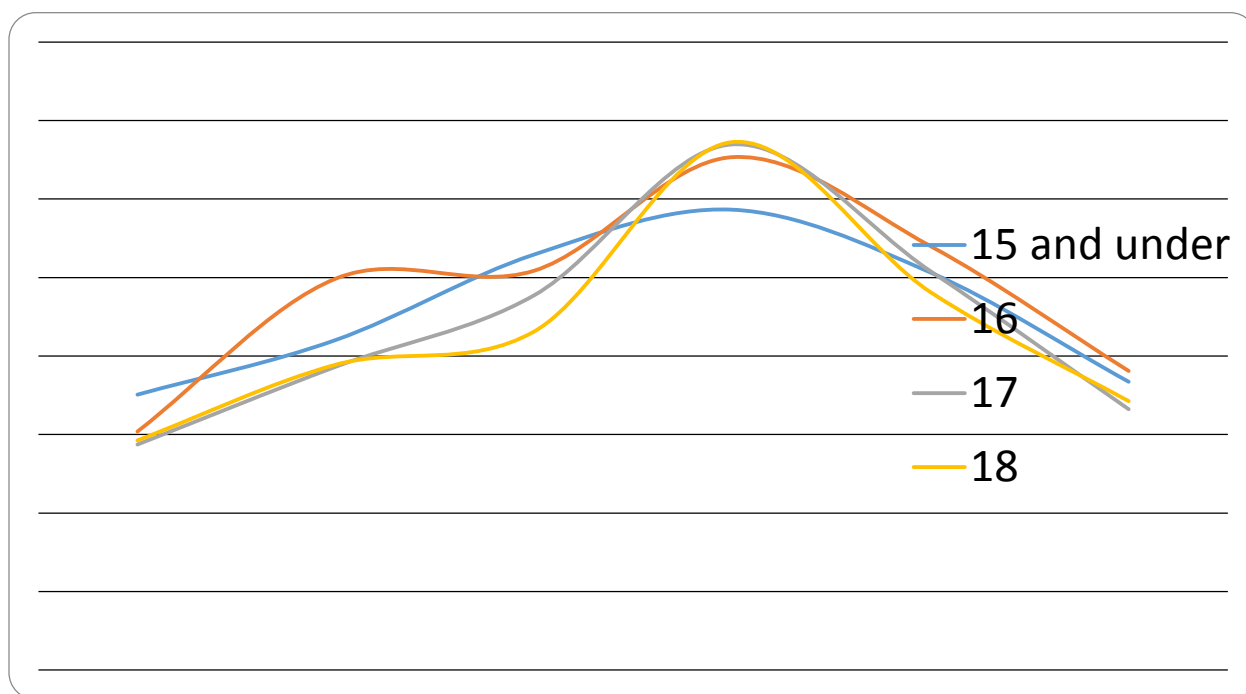
That is, there is a significant difference when averaging the total points of the Social and Enterprising domains, in this case a difference of almost eight points, which increases the stability of the personality profile (Holland, Powell, & Fritzsche, 1994).

Overall, individuals such as these have a preference for activities that “inform, train, develop, cure, or enlighten” (Holland, 1997, p. 24). Thus, the criteria being used to recruit these Future Educator Association members appear to be well-suited for the teaching profession. Interestingly, the overall Holland code established for this sample (Social, Enterprising, Artistic) was very similar to the classification for teachers (Social, Artistic, Enterprising) (Gottfredson & Holland, 1996; Swanson, 2008). In fact, Holland urges individuals to “rearrange the code letters in all possible ways to explore occupations under those three letter codes” (Holland, Powell, & Fritzsche, 1994, p. 268) to enhance the congruency between interests and the workplace environment.

Pinpointing chronologically when to recruit teachers

A second and perhaps even more exciting finding appeared as I was analyzing the *SDS* data. While it is known that the selection of a career takes place early in life, less is known about when adolescents’ vocational interests begin to surge. By breaking down the data and examining each group’s Holland Code, I found that while the interest profile remained unchanged (Social, Enterprising, Artistic), participants expressed increasingly more interest in the three domains as their age increased. Of particular interest was the dramatic change between the 15 and 16 year-old age groups (See Chart 2).

Chart 2



As the students begin to enter high school, their interests were no longer relatively equal in all six domains. Data analysis showed that the students' Social and Enterprising interests jumped significantly, indicating that they tend to want to serve others, believe in equality for all, value the opportunity to be free of control, and aspire to be a leader (Holland, 1997). However, the same individuals' Artistic interests declined marginally, suggesting that these students' self-beliefs of non-conformity, originality, and liberal thought started to change somewhat. Overall, the group's interests continue to become more refined throughout by the time the student is in his/her nineteenth year of life. Again, the Holland code does not change but becomes much more pronounced with sharp peaks that indicate vocational differentiation as measured by interests.

Long-term effects

At a time when global teacher attrition rates are increasing due to a variety of factors from more attractive job opportunities to the aging of the current pool of teachers, there remains a lack of consensus regarding the reasons. Nevertheless, "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), for reasons such as feelings of isolation in the classroom, inadequate classroom management skills, work schedules, and insufficient preparation for dealing with cultural diversity in schools. Even more alarming is that for those who enter the teaching profession through alternate routes, such as emergency certification, the rate of attrition can be as high as 60% (Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001) within the first two years of teaching (Lauer, 2001).

The *SDS* addresses the notion of career stability and future employment persistence in its introductory section. When students begin filling out the *SDS*, they fill out the Occupational Daydreams section first which asks them to list the occupations they have considered for their future. After the students complete taking the inventory, the Occupational Daydreams are then categorized using the *Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes* (Gottfredson & Holland, 1996) to determine Holland codes for each occupation. Afterwards, the Holland code from the first career that students listed is compared with the student’s Holland code from the *SDS*. Both theory and research suggest that high levels of congruence between the codes of aspirations and the *SDS* Holland code indicate future persistence in occupations, more stability in work history, and the direction of career preferences or work histories (Holland, 1997; Reardon & Lens, 1998, 1999).

For the students in the sample, 91% of the students indicated they wanted to be a teacher and 72% of the students’ first letter of their Holland code matched the code established for teachers, which adds supporting evidence that the group’s vocational interests are aligned well with the teaching profession. Further, the guidance students receive from participating in a

Future Education Association program may contribute significantly to the retention of these much needed quality pre-service educators.

Now what?

Phi Delta Kappa's Future Education Association offers middle and high school age students a realistic understanding of education as a profession and the role of the teacher. Evidence from this research strongly suggests that student recruitment into the teaching profession might be improved by focusing on students in the 15-16 year old age group who are interested in a career in education. Encouraging these individuals to set educational and career goals early in life, exploring teaching through direct experience in the classrooms, and becoming citizen leaders through school/community service appears to be a valid strategy. While a standardized curriculum for Future Educator Association programs has not been implemented, chapter advisors most likely play a fundamental role in the development of these individuals as do the classroom teachers with whom future teachers work during observation/practicum opportunities.

Additionally, collaboration between Future Educator Association advisors and school counselors could take place where students between the ages of 15 and 16 years of age are given a vocational preference inventory such as the *SDS* or the *Strong Campbell* to help identify future educators whose Holland code resembles one discussed here. Once recognized, these students could then be encouraged to join Future Education Association chapters and experience teaching activities that promote quality education. Further, these individuals could explore the profession in more depth, attend pre-service induction conferences. Arrangements could be made to visit college campuses to attend education and content-area specific classes, to meet with pre-service

educators, and possibly become not only an integral part of the teaching profession, but find enjoyment in a long-term career working with the next generation of students.

For first-generation students whose parents did not attend institutions of higher education, such collaboration between colleges of education and Future Education Association chapters could be a significant first step to help these students transition from secondary school to a collegiate environment. Lastly, I urge the educational community to work closely with chapter advisors to invite future educators to local, area, state, regional, and even national education conferences to take advantage of the sharing of knowledge and learn more about the profession from experts in the field. Early induction into the profession could help to reduce possible attrition, therefore retaining more teachers, especially during a shortage of educators.

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