



*Evidence Summary*

**Assessing Vocational Development in Prospective School Librarians**

**A Review of:**

Jones, S. (2010). The occupational choice of school librarians. *Library Trends*, 59(1-2), 166-187.

**Reviewed by:**

Gayle Bogel

Assistant Professor

Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions, Fairfield University

Fairfield, Connecticut, United States of America

Email: [gbogel@fairfield.edu](mailto:gbogel@fairfield.edu)

**Received:** 29 June 2011

**Accepted:** 15 Oct. 2011

© 2011 Bogel. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons-Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike License 2.5 Canada (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/ca/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed, not used for commercial purposes, and, if transformed, the resulting work is redistributed under the same or similar license to this one.

---

**Abstract**

**Objective** – To explore the motivations for choosing school librarianship as a career.

**Design** – Narrative research, qualitative interviews.

**Setting** – The School Media program specialization in a Master of Library Science program at a large research university.

**Subjects** – Five graduate school students seeking initial certification as school library media specialists.

**Methods** – The researcher employed narrative research, based on career construction theory and the Life Story Interview, (McAdams, 1995). This methodology is a set of loosely-structured, open-ended questions designed to

encourage detailed, in-depth responses from the participant teller, combined with a more structured Career Style Interview (Savickas, 2005) designed to elicit self-defining stories.

Data was collected through qualitative interviews, using personal narrative interviews that focused on the entire life of each person from birth to present (Life Story Interviews) and additional questions in an interview format (Career Style Interview.)

Data was collected and analyzed in two stages. The analysis first examined participants as individuals then tried to identify commonalities among the stories. Each life story was examined to determine a career style on the basis of vocational personality, career adaptability and life theme. The interview data was then analyzed for thematic connections and occupational choice.

**Main Results** – The final analysis identified the following themes as relevant to the study, and to the career choices of graduate students planning to be school librarians: parental expectations; career changers; librarian mentors; prior library work experiences; reading; library experiences; altruism-service; desire to work with children; financial stability and security; flexibility of work schedule; emotional distance; and vocational personality.

In general, the participants appear to value safe, traditional career choices that allow them to put family first and maintain a flexible work schedule, while also providing financial stability and security. Those who are already teachers noted interest in a job that provides relief and emotional distance from the everyday social problems of students. All five noted the “love of reading” as a motivation for choosing this career path.

The vocational personality of each subject was determined through interpreting their answers on the Career Interest Surveys, using Holland Occupational Theme RIASEC codes: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. The vocational personality of all five students did not match the predominant code for school librarians. None exhibited a resemblance to the “enterprising” type, the most prominent personality for successful school librarians. All five did exhibit “artistic” vocational personality, and the researcher notes that this may be an explanation for the choice of librarianship as a second career, as artistic types take longer to find a compatible career match. The researcher also notes that the final code is a “best estimate” for each subject.

**Conclusion** – Examining the vocational development of the five graduate students through vocational personality, career adaption and life theme afforded a broader viewpoint than traditional survey studies. The determining of vocational personality type may be helpful to recruitment efforts to the profession, and help make the career choice more visible.

## Commentary

The sample size and demographic composition of this study have a great effect on the validity of the results put forward by the researcher. While the limitation in sample is acknowledged, the researcher does not acknowledge that the bias in the results gives an inaccurate picture of those who are entering the field. Although the researcher notes that the vocational personality of the five participants did not match the most prominent type for school librarians, she states that “every occupation has room for a wide range of personalities” (p. 176). She does not resolve that these participants are not representative of successful school librarians in the larger professional community as identified through interpretations in other studies and the rating scale. The rating scale itself clearly notes the enterprising personality type as the predominant trait for school librarians.

There is a striking contrast between the graduate students’ perceptions of the field and the reality of current working situations in school libraries. None of the participants mentioned motivation related to interest or expertise in implementing technology, and seemed unaware that their career choice would demand rigorous training in technology skills. For library educators, this finding has enormous implications for helping pre-service librarians gain a clear understanding of the demands in the field, and ensuring that those who graduate are well equipped to implement current best practices that rely heavily on integrating technology and content in the curriculum. The “love of reading” that was prominently noted as a motivation for entering the field needs to be firmly linked to “love of technology” as consistent theme for pre-service school librarians.

The participants did not view their career choice as a challenging or forward-thinking role in school reform (American Association of School Libraries [AASL], 2010), but relied on stereotypical views of libraries and educational environments as “safe” traditional

choices. The finding that emotional distance was a motivating factor for classroom teachers who doubted their ability to maintain relationships with students is a troubling observation, and illustrates the misperceptions common to many educators that the work of school librarians is less demanding than classroom teaching.

The implications for practice stated by the researcher for recruiting school librarians are based on the assumption that the personality traits of the study participants lead to successful careers. Given the current emphasis on advocacy, leadership, and finely honed collaborative and technological skills (AASL, 2011; Zmuda and Harada, 2008), these graduate students did not appear to understand or possess the necessary dispositions for satisfaction with their career choices. A larger implication for library educators is that preparing new professionals may require significant focus on personal development and dispositions.

While the overall approach of this research may yield helpful results for school library educators as they help pre-service school librarians develop the skills and dispositions to be successful, a follow up study with a closer look at successful school librarians would be a welcome balance to this otherwise well-designed study.

## References

- American Association of School Librarians. (2010). *Standards for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner*. Retrieved June 4, 2011, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/learningstandards/standards.cfm>
- American Association of School Librarians. (2011). *A Planning Guide for Empowering Learners*. Retrieved June 4, 2011, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/planningguide/planningguide.cfm>
- McAdams, D. P. (1995). *The life story interview*. Retrieved May 29, 2007, from Northwestern University School of Education and Social Policy, Foley Center: <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/instruments/interview/>
- Savickas, M. L. (2005). The theory and practice of career construction. In S. Brown & R. Lent. (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 42–70). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley
- Zmuda, A., & Harada, V. H. (2008). *Librarians as learning specialists: Meeting the learning imperative for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.