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Introducing Homeschooling Students to the Librarian Profession and Personality Types

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Introduction

The librarian profession needs diversity in its membership to provide service to the variety of patrons who visit libraries and to have the array of skills needed for a library to succeed. Jaeger and Franklin (2017, 23–24) have encouraged the use of inclusive services and outreach programs that take advantage of the diversity inherent in the United States' population to stir interest in the librarianship profession. Homeschooling students come from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds and rely on public libraries to gain access to curriculum materials, educational programming, and technology. Librarians can use outreach programs to introduce homeschoolers to the variety of librarian positions available, the personality types found in librarianship, and to encourage homeschoolers to enter the library profession. This essay will describe personality types that may exist in librarianship and the need for librarians to know about them; it will also provide an example of an outreach workshop that is designed to stress the importance of having this knowledge for professional development.

Personality Types and Librarians

Personality Types and the Librarian Profession

Personality types are classifications of an individual's personality traits that describe how that individual behaves when interacting with others and their surroundings (Semeijn, Van der Heijden, and A. De Beuckelaer 2018, 1–3). The wide interest in librarian personality studies has been driven by librarians' self-curiosity and tendency to organize things by categories. Librarians have used personality type studies to analyze and discredit several negative stereotypes associated with their profession. In fiction and films, librarians are often portrayed as intelligent, middle-aged loners whose love of books and rules and lack of social skills isolate them from the rest of society (Jennings 2016, 97–98). Librarians have fought against such depictions because they do not display the true nature of the profession and present librarians as flawed, unsocial people. Librarians have also

pushed back against the stereotypical image that they are stuck in the past with outdated books. Librarians are often at the front edge of technological adoption, and their knowledge of developments and trends allows them to help patrons become familiar with the newest technologies (Posner 2015, 2–4). Studies of librarian personalities have found that entertainment’s stereotypical depictions do not reflect the true variety of librarians, their skills, and their personality types. While there is a tendency for librarians to appear overly professional and have reserved dispositions, they represent a diverse group with many personality types that are caring, open, and willing to share with coworkers and patrons (Sawal et al. 2016, 31–32).

Differing Personality Types in Various Librarian Positions

While librarians have a mixture of personality types, it has been shown that those with similar personality traits gravitate toward similar positions. Librarians with same personality traits often enter into positions in the same kinds of libraries whether they are academic, public, or specialized libraries. Librarians with outgoing personalities generally find satisfaction and success in positions that frequently interact with other individuals, such as reference services. Those who prefer solo projects usually enjoy and succeed in positions such as cataloging and technical services, where working with technology is essential (Dority 2016, 20–23). Librarians with either extroverted or introverted personalities can be leaders in their organizations, but there is a stronger tendency for extroverts to assume leadership roles. It is a good managerial strategy for libraries to have a mixture of personality types among their project leaders and administrators and to take advantage of their differing insights and strengths (Farrell 2017, 442–443).

The Need for Personality Type Training in the Library Profession

Employers’ Rising Demands for Non-Traditional Skill Sets

Libraries must update their collections and adapt the services they provide to meet the needs of their patrons. It is now common for libraries to serve as more than repositories of information for a community. Many libraries have incorporated learning labs and makerspaces into their facilities to allow patrons to learn programs and use technologies they otherwise would not have access to (Koh and Abbas 2015, 119–122). Offering new resources and training for patrons has changed libraries and the proficiency requirements for librarians. While the traditional core competencies for librarians and information specialists are still valid, multidisciplinary soft skills are becoming more valued and demanded by employers (Bronstein 2015, 135–136). Soft skills are loosely defined as emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills that librarians use to assist patrons and work with other library staff and managers. Soft skills include, for example, the ability to leverage diversity, face to face and electronic communication expertise, decision making acumen, knowledge of and training in working with differing personality types, and social skills (Matteson, Anderson, and Boyden 2016, 75–78).

Librarians' Need for Personality Type Training

Career choices are driven by an individual's personality and internal motivations. Those interested in the librarian profession should seek positions with duties that align with their inherent traits and allow opportunities to be involved in projects they find interesting and valuable to themselves and their communities (Ho et al. 2018, 143–144). By learning about and knowing their own personality traits, librarians can bolster their self-image and gain information that will allow them find positions that offer satisfaction and success (Kalil 2016, 21–22). Librarians can also use their knowledge of personality types to better understand and adapt the librarianship profession beyond its traditional boundaries. For librarians involved in non-traditional functions, such as serving as an embedded librarian, being aware of their own personality type and the personality types in an organization can help them work with the dynamics of a group and provide the best service (Mlinar 2019, 55–58).

Library Leaders' Need for Personality Type Training

Library leaders need personality type training to understand their leadership style and gain insight into the variety of personalities that work in and visit their library. Library leaders can use personality type training to understand what drives different personalities and create outreach programming that engages library users in ways that fit their information-seeking motivations (Holley 2015, 600–602). Personality type training can also help library leaders make hiring determinations for positions based on an applicant's individual characteristics and the kinds of projects that the librarian would work on. Having knowledge of personality types can also help managers find effective ways to encourage library staff and to guide them to opportunities and training that would motivate them and allow them to grow (Williamson and Lorensbury 2016, 139–140).

Introducing Personality Types and Library Careers to Homeschooling Students

Librarians can use outreach workshops with homeschooling students to introduce them to different library positions and types of libraries. Linking examples of librarian's positions with individual student interests can broaden their knowledge of librarianship and encourage them to consider becoming librarians. Even if students decide not to pursue a career in the library field, attending the workshop will allow them to learn about personality types in general, their own Myers-Briggs personality type in particular, and ways this knowledge can help them in their career paths.

Knowing their personality type and receiving personality type training can help students succeed in several ways. It helps hone the processes they use to learn concepts, improve their career and educational decision making, and change the ways they interact with others (Moore, Dettlaff, and Dietz 2004, 340). Students who are aware of their personality type can use their knowledge to find learning strategies and tools that best fit their learning styles. It has become vital for students to know their personality types and learning styles as more digital and online learning tools are introduced into education.

This knowledge can help students determine which digital tools would be best for them so they can make the most out of the time they invest in studying (Tlili et al. 2016, 807–811). Students who know their personality type and how it can impact their choice of educational programs and professions have an easier time of deciding which universities and courses of study match their personality preferences and have better success in the paths they choose (Ismail, Basharirad, and Ismail 2017, 63–66). Students with personality type training usually solve group-based problem assignments more efficiently and work better with team members to accomplish goals (Main, Delcourt, and Treffinger 2017, 10).

Below is a sample outline of a workshop that librarians can use to introduce students to personality types and the librarian profession. The workshop is designed to take 60 minutes. It is framed as a non-graded activity, but can be adapted into a scored assignment if desired.

Who Are You and What Kind of Librarian Could You Be? Workshop

Resources Needed

- Instructor Librarian(s)
- Handouts and supporting materials for students
- Internet access—through a computer lab, laptops, or mobile devices
- 60 minutes

Goals for the Workshop

- Provide students with an introduction to personality types and personality testing.
- Teach students how knowledge of their personality type can help them discover library positions they may be interested in.
- Inform students how knowing about personality types can be useful in their personal and professional lives.

Objectives for Students

- Obtain knowledge of basic terminology and concepts of personality types
- Learn about possible librarian career paths
- Discover their individual personality type

Introduction (5 minutes)

During the session's opening, instructors introduce themselves, tell students what position they have in the library, and the letters of their own Myers-Briggs personality type. To start the session's conversation with the students, instructors ask students what they think personality types are and what they think each of the letters represent. Instructors then explain that each letter represents a personality trait that links with the other three letters and personality traits to form a personality type, which is a general description of how a person gets their energy and interacts with the people around them and the world.

Discussion of Personality Testing and Types (15 minutes)

Instructors tell students that there are a variety of ways of looking at individuals' personality characteristics and give examples of personality tests such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Hexaco Personality Inventory, and the Enneagram personality test. Instructors then introduce the variety of ways that personality tests can be used, for example, in career development, counseling, and as aids to determining learning style preferences.

Instructors explain that they will focus on the Myers-Briggs personality test for the workshop because it has been linked with librarian personality studies and is one of the preferred tests used by career counselors. Instructors then describe the categories of the Myers-Briggs personality preferences and traits while using examples of differing library positions they believe would fit with the preferences and traits they are discussing. The following sample framework can be used for class discussions.

Extroversion and Introversion Traits and Preferences (Focus and Energy Gathering)

Extroversion and introversion describe how a person focuses on tasks and gains energy or motivation. Individuals who are extroverts prefer to work with others to accomplish tasks and like to share with others the knowledge they have in group settings. Those with introverted characteristics like to work on things alone and give the task they are working on their full attention. Introverts prefer to share with small groups or using indirect means such as writing to others about what they accomplished.

Extroverts (E)

- Gain energy and inspiration from others
- Remain interested in something if others are involved
- Focus on the world and those around them
- Librarians with Extrovert Preferences and Traits: Young Adult Librarians and Marketing and Outreach Librarians

Introverts (I)

- Gain energy and creativity while alone
- Retain interest if they are examining things or working solo
- Focus on internal impressions and thoughts
- Librarians with Introvert Preferences and Traits: Cataloging Librarians and Technical Services Librarians

Sensing and Intuition Traits and Preferences (Methods of Information Gathering)

The sensing and intuition traits describe how an individual takes in details and thinks about the world. Individuals with sensing tendencies take in details using the full array of senses and focus on what is around them. Those who have the intuitional trait focus on connections, ideas, and relationships between items or ideas and what is possible more than what is around them.

Sensing (S)

- Focus on what is available to them and enjoy established rules or steps
- Detail-oriented and use their senses to gain knowledge of the world
- Focused and patient with tasks
- Librarians with Sensing Preferences and Traits: Engineering Librarians and Biology or Medical Librarians

Intuition (N)

- Focus on future events and what could be
- Like abstract thinking and creating imaginative solutions or new approaches
- Come at tasks from a variety of directions and go with what feels right
- Librarians with Intuitive Preferences and Traits: Academic Librarians and Journalism Librarians

**Thinking and Feeling
(Approaches to Reaching Conclusions)**

The traits of thinking and feeling indicate how an individual comes to conclusions. Those who show thinking characteristics approach projects like a puzzle and use logic to break down what they are seeing or working with so that the most efficient solution can be reached. Individuals with feeling characteristics take their feelings and the feelings of others in consideration when examining a problem or working on a project so that the most people can be happy with an outcome.

Thinking (T)

- Focus on facts and logic
- Emphasize justice and fairness
- Detached and not prone to focus on feelings
- Librarians with Thinking Preferences and Traits: Research Librarians and Automation Librarians

Feeling (F)

- Concerned with personal values and maintaining happiness for themselves and others
- Show tendencies for compassion and forgiveness
- Consider others' emotions when thinking about solutions
- Librarians with Feeling Preferences and Traits: Children's Librarians and Public Librarians

**Judging and Perceiving Traits
(Categorizing and Interacting with the World)**

Judging and perceiving describe how a person interacts and organizes the world. Individuals with judging traits like to establish clear guidelines and have structure in their activities and surroundings. Those with perceiving traits are fluid in their routines and like to become involved in a project and then make necessary changes as things develop.

Judging (J)

- Like to have structure and clear ends to projects
- Plan out their actions before a project and remain organized
- Set goals and work to meet them
- Librarians with Judging Traits: Legal Librarians, Archivist Librarians

Perceiving (P)

- Flexible in their routines
- Gain context and information while working on a project
- Open to letting things happen and adapting as needed
- Librarians with Perceiving Traits: Interactive Media Librarians and Reference Librarians

After introducing the personality preferences and traits, it should be stressed to students that while there are positions that have a tendency to attract librarians with certain personality traits it does not mean those traits are required for someone to enter the position. It should also be pointed out that because an individual has a tendency to exhibit characteristics of one personality preference or trait it does not mean they cannot use a variety of approaches to what they are working on, much like having the ability to use either hand to open a door (Sides 2017, 4).

After learning about the Myers-Briggs personality preferences and traits, students are then introduced to the 16 personality types possible through the combinations of personality traits. To keep sessions under 60 minutes, a detailed examination of the various personality types may not be practical. Students will learn about their own personality types upon completion of the online Myers-Briggs assessment through the personality type descriptions at the end of the online assessments. If students ask for more information, offering handouts with detailed explanations is a practical solution. Instructors can point out that the main differentiation for personality types is based on the extroversion and introversion traits because of the substantial impact of ways a person interacts with others. Instructors can also tell students that librarians have been found to have a slightly higher tendency to be introverted when compared to the general population, but there are many extroverted librarians and there is a tendency for those in library leadership positions to be extroverts.

Preparing for and Taking the Myers-Briggs Assessment (30 minutes)

Before students take the Myers-Briggs assessment, instructors should ask them to write down the characteristics they think describe their personality. This prompts them to connect the theory they just learned to themselves and to think about their own personality characteristics. Their predictions will also be used as points of discussion during the review portion of the workshop.

Students should then be asked to take a version of the Myers-Briggs assessment online and to read the materials provided by the website about their personality traits and types. Sites such as 16personalities.com and humanmetrics.com allow users to take versions of the Myers-Briggs assessment without charge and without requesting test-takers to provide personal data. Online assessments take an average of 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Discussion of Results and Possible Careers in Librarianship (10 minutes)

After completing the assessment and reviewing the personality type, instructors can prompt students to talk about their results and their thoughts by asking questions such as:

- Do the results of the test match up with the predictions you made?
- Are there any aspects of your personality type description you were surprised by?
- Are there any aspects of the personality trait description that you received that you do not agree with? If so, why do you think the trait is off the mark?
- Is there a personality trait you received that you are glad to see?
- Do you think people who know you would agree with the personality type you received?

Instructors can ask students what kinds of librarian positions they believe match their personality traits and whether they would find such positions appealing. Instructors should reiterate that personality traits and types preclude no one from pursuing a library position that interests them; that having a variety of personality types has been found to be an asset for libraries. Instructors can also point out that because of the changing dynamics within libraries, for example, the inclusion of makerspaces and learning labs, students may be able to enter new librarianship career paths that have not been developed yet.

Conclusion

To meet the need for diversity, librarians have used personality type studies and training to understand themselves and to strengthen the profession. To attract new professionals from a variety of backgrounds, librarians can reach out to homeschooling students through workshops introducing them to the librarianship and personality types. By discussing personality types and careers associated with them, librarians can introduce students to the types of libraries and the varied librarian positions. During workshops, students can learn about themselves and how knowing their personality type can help them in their careers and personal lives.

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