



Evidence Summary

Cataloguers May Tend to Have Learning Styles Different from Other Library Job Responsibilities

A Review of:

Rinehart, A., Sharkey, J., & Kahl, C. (2015). Learning style dimensions and professional characteristics of academic librarians. *College & Research Libraries*, 76(4),450-468. doi: 10.5860/crl.76.4.450

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Abstract

Objective – To determine whether relationships exist between academic librarians' learning styles and their professional work responsibilities.

Design – Self-selecting survey.

Setting – Email listservs.

Subjects – 1579 academic librarians.

Methods – The authors used the Index of Learning Styles questionnaire, based on the Felder-Silverman Learning Styles model consisting of eight dimensions on four scales: Active/Reflective, Sensing/Intuitive, Visual/Verbal, and Sequential/Global. The multiple choice survey was distributed online

to 23 email listservs for academic librarians in 2011, and to 14 additional listservs in 2013 targeting technical services librarians. 1579 responses were received in total, which were analyzed using ANOVA with a Tukey-Kramer post-hoc mean separation, and descriptively using observed frequencies.

Main Results – In examining the relationship between positions and learning styles, the study revealed there to be five statistically significant *p*-values when the data were analyzed. Catalogers (*n*=145) were found to be more reflective learners compared to Administrative (*n*=321) and Instruction librarians (*n*=228) at the *p* = 0.009 level. Administrative, Instruction, and "Other" librarians were found to be more intuitive learners than Catalogers, who are more likely to be sensing learners, at the *p* = 0.0004 level.

Digital librarians (n=40) are more likely to be visual learners and Catalogers more likely to be sequential learners when compared to several other librarian categories, at the $p = 0.020$ and $p = 0.001$ levels respectively.

Conclusions – The authors concluded that there were some statistically significant differences between librarians' learning styles scores according to job responsibilities. Catalogers were found to have different learning styles than other types of librarians for three out of four scales. Based on these findings, the authors indicate that further research into how librarians' work responsibilities impact learning styles is justified.

Commentary

There are many ways to understand the complex process of learning, and learning styles have received a great deal of attention in the educational realm. Many studies have appeared both supporting and criticizing learning styles theories and instruments, including a body of research critical of learning styles that begins largely with Curry (1990) and extends to Pashler et al. (2008), who conducted a review of the literature and found an inadequate evidence base to justify incorporating learning styles into educational practice. A number of studies have explored learning styles as applied to library instruction. Relevant to the goals of the study at hand, two articles have considered librarians' learning styles, including Choi (1989), and Squires, Hoopes, & Gillum (1992).

This investigation includes a number of factors that contribute positively to its validity. The historical development of learning styles is well documented and summarized, and the model used for the study is clearly described for those unfamiliar with learning styles. The authors acknowledge other viewpoints in the learning styles debate, and include a discussion of the validity of the Index for Learning Styles used in the study. Additionally, the reasons for selecting the

instrument and the ways it is scored are useful information in weighing the evidence presented.

Some of the research's limitations are worth noting. The survey response rate was not calculated, and as the authors observe, the respondents were non-random and self-selected. The possibility of receiving duplicate responses appears to be significant, as the survey was sent to a large number of listservs two years apart. It was not mentioned whether the research received IRB approval. As noted in the study, several of the instrument's questions were more appropriate for students in a classroom environment than for professionals. The authors describe several practice implications regarding learning styles, including matching one's learning style to professional development opportunities and the possibility of managers in library settings being mindful of employees' preferences, which would require learning styles activities to be conducted in one's workplace.

The study contributes evidence that some academic librarian position types may potentially be more inclined toward certain learning styles. Because of the study's correlational nature, it cannot be ascertained whether people with a certain learning style are more likely to choose cataloging, or whether the work of cataloging could cultivate a particular learning style. Given that one's work duties are not necessarily equivalent to oneself in regards to learning preferences, additional avenues could be explored. For example, librarians might work across different departments, feel that their current position is not a good fit for their abilities, or delineate between personal and professional learning. As such, the qualitative investigation of learning among librarians might be pursued by considering what compels librarians to learn, how professional development interests change over the course of one's career, or if there are links to one's teaching style, including what librarians themselves identify as key factors influencing their learning.

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