

## Developing Competence to Teach Psychology's History: From Babblor to Dabblor

Mark L. Savickas, Ph.D., Department of Behavioral Sciences, Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine

My interest in teaching the history of psychology arose from dedication to my field of vocational psychology, not from an interest in history itself. To teach vocational psychology well and to practice it effectively, I wanted to know all about it. To paraphrase Julian Jaynes, the history of vocational psychology is vocational psychology, and it cannot be studied seriously apart from its history. I have found that the history of my specialty has been tremendously useful in advancing my professional goals. I select the word "useful" quite purposively. While history shapes the present, it also can be used to advance present interests and attitudes. In this sense, the past takes lessons from the present, reshaping itself to fit our current needs. In telling the history of vocational psychology, I try to shape its future. From the many facts to teach, investigate, and publish, I usually select those that support present goals. I seek to use history constructively to (a) reinvigorate my discipline, (b) influence its future course, (c) recruit and motivate students, and (d) inform my research.

First, I use history to reinvigorate my specialty. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, vocational psychology has gone from the center of applied psychology to its margins. Its proponents must understand the historical factors and circumstance that made vocational psychology an "ex-centric." Second, trying to influence the specialty's agenda for the next decade requires an analysis of its past contributions and present status. An attractive future must be rooted in a compelling past. Third, similar to how autobiography shapes psychosocial identity construction, the history of vocational psychology shapes construction of professional identity. Learning who "begat" them helps students select icons with whom they identify and role model who they can imitate. Furthermore, history deepens students understanding of contemporary issues and current debates, especially when they find that the "current" debate started 100 years ago. And fourth, knowing the history of an issue or variable enables researchers to formulate better hypotheses.

I will describe how these four points motivated me to become "almost" competent to teach and write about the history of vocational psychology as well as to have written a biography of a seminal figure in vocational psychology and an intellectual history of the construct of "interest." My path of developing the competence to become what Dewsbury calls a "dabblor" -- and stop feeling like a babblor-- includes: subscribing to the journal *History of Psychology*, reading textbooks on the history of psychology, studying Barzun's book on how to write a history textbook, attending sessions sponsored by Divisions 2 and 26, visiting the Archives at the University of Akron, learning how to find obscure documents, obtaining a relatively complete library of historical texts in vocational psychology, obtaining and analyzing a complete sets of the four leading journals in my field starting with the volume published in 1913, preserving contemporary documents and stories in a repository for future historians, constructing a family tree of who begat who, investigating the biographies of and family influences on prominent vocational psychologists, and studying the stories of institutions that have played prominent roles in the history of vocational psychology including the YMCA, Carnegie Tech, Columbia University, and the University of Minnesota. As I continue to study and teach the history of vocational psychology, I do not believe I am a historian; instead, I feel increasingly competent as a vocational psychologist.