

A MODEL VOCATIONAL EVALUATION PROGRAM FOR THE LEARNING DISABLED ADULT

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ABSTRACT: Traditionally, learning disabilities (LD) have been viewed as handicapping conditions remediated upon completion of the educational process. However, current literature indicates that there are life-long vocational and social implications for the LD adult. Deficits in perceptual abilities, academic skills, and psycho-social skills typically hinder the LD adult in obtaining job-specific vocational skills which often result in unemployment or underemployment. In order to assess such limitations, a comprehensive evaluation is required. A cooperative effort between the Sparks Center for Developmental and Learning Disorders and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) has resulted in wholistic model utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to assessment of the LD adult. Interdisciplinary consultation provides information concerning physical, medical, nutritional, language, hearing, visual, educational, psychological, social, and vocational aspects. The variety of measurement instruments employed yield information regarding psycho-social skills, perceptual organization, literacy, and language function as well as worker skills and work habits. Collaboration between the Sparks Center team, the VRS counselor, the individual, and the family enhances the overall effectiveness of vocational planning for this target population.

Through the years, handicapping conditions have been of concern to a variety of health and human service professionals. Research regarding the impact of these conditions on all aspects of exception to this has been the research pertaining to life-long implications of specific learning disabilities. Since the 1960's, substantial resources have been directed toward the learning disabled (LD) population; however, this has occurred largely within educational settings. Indeed, learning disabilities have traditionally been considered educationally handicapping conditions of childhood. However, professionals in the human services, most notably rehabilitation services, have become increasingly aware of the frequently multitudinous obstacles faced by the LD adult. Deficiencies in intellectual functioning, perceptual abilities, social skills, academic achievement, and personal maturity have hindered LD adults in successful vocational and social adjustment (Cronin & Gerber, 1982). LD adults have typically experienced underemployment or unemployment as a result of such dysfunctions. This has posed a need for a comprehensive or wholistic model of vocational evaluation subsequent to vocational planning for LD adults. In an effort to identify and respond to the various needs of learning disabled adults, a cooperative effort between the Sparks Center for Developmental and Learning Disorders and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) has resulted in such a wholistic model of assessment for the adult learning disabled population.

The Adult LD Project at the Sparks Center has based its services on a multidisciplinary approach to assessment. Though the major focus of the Project has been adjustment oriented, vocational evaluation has provided the basis for vocational planning and subsequent adjustment/transitional services. The wholistic model employed in vocational evaluation has drawn upon a wide spectrum of expertise

at the Sparks Center. LD team members have consulted with the Divisions of Psychology, Social Services, Nutrition, and Vision Function regularly. Additional consults have been provided by other divisions as necessary: Medicine, Speech and Hearing, Physical Therapy/Occupational Therapy. Information from these disciplines has provided an extensive data base for more in-depth assessment of functional assets and limitations as related to vocational success.

Review of Literature

A review of literature has indicated various factors contributing to successful school and vocational adjustment. These factors included social adjustment, vocational training, and academic competencies. However, the LD adult continued to manifest deficits in each of these areas.

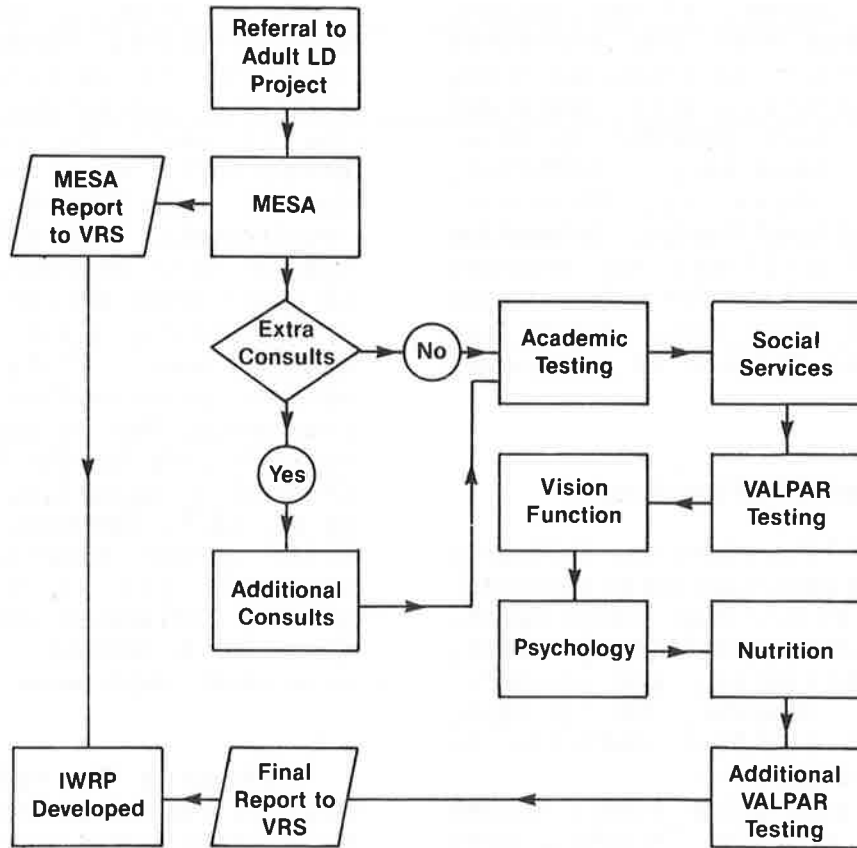
Sherbenou and Holub (1982) stated that academic deficits (reading, math written language, spoken language) were common in all LD adolescents. These academic deficits persisted in adults (Blalock & Dixon, 1982) thus interfering with social and vocational success (Faford & Haubrich, 1981) since they influenced future training and employment.

Although some LD adults developed appropriate social skills and positive self-concepts, emotional instability was a major manifestation in LD adults (Blalock & Dixon, 1981; Sherbenou & Holub). Emotional turmoil was often reflected in unemployment or under-employment (Crimando & Nichols, 1982). Deficiencies in social perception frequently acted as a catalyst for problems in interpersonal relationships (Axelrod, 1982; Minskoff, 1980; Sherbenou & Holub, 1982; Wanat, 1983) which threatened successful vocational and social adjustment. Indeed, many (Kronick, 1978; Lerner, Evans and Meyers, 1977) believed poor social adjustment to be more disabling than academic dysfunctions in LD adults.

In addition, LD adults were often occupationally immature since their exposure to career education was limited or non-existent. As a result, the LD adult frequently developed unrealistic vocational aspirations due to unfamiliarity with basic job requirements. If a realistic vocational choice were designated, though, the LD adult often demonstrated ineptitude in developing plans to attain those aspirations. This indicated the need for career awareness and vocational counseling for successful transition to adult life for the learning disabled (Fafard & Haubrich, 1981; Lerner, et al. 1977; Sherbenou & Holub, 1982). Since career knowledge as well as academic and social competencies greatly influenced vocational success (Cronin & Gerber, 1982), various assessment needs were identified.

Since a learning disability was such a multi-dimensional condition, evaluations were required by various disciplines to identify the particular traits manifested by the LD adult. Cronin and Gerber (1982) suggested that this evaluation process consist of medical examination, a psychological assessment, a social assessment, and educational testing. In addition, a vocational assessment was considered a critical facet in this evaluation process since it assessed vocational interest, aptitude and work traits. This interdisciplinary approach to assessment required measures of adaptive behavior (Patton & Polloway, 1982), social skills, vocational academics, and functional daily living skills (Sherbenou & Holub, 1982.) In addition, the use of work samples (commercial and informal and behavioral observation was recommended in assessing work related skills and functional competencies. Information from such an interdisciplinary approach could then be utilized in career/vocational planning with LD adults (Cronin & Gerber, 1982; Sherbenou & Holub, 1982.)

FIGURE 1



Description of Model

As stated previously, the Adult LD Project at the Sparks Center routinely utilized assessment techniques offered by the Divisions of Psychology, Social Services, Nutrition, Vision Function, and Special Education/Vocational Rehabilitation. Consultation was provided as needed with the other divisions. Each division has identified a variety of standardized and informal measures:

- Division of Psychology - Wais-R, MMPI, Zung, Beck
- Division of Nutrition - completion of informal food intake
- Division of Vision Function - assesses visual acuity, Bender Gestalt, Test for Visual Analysis Skills, Money Road Map Test, Koppitz Visual Aural Digit Span Test, Getman-Henderson-Marcus Visual Memory Test, Test for Auditory Analysis Skills, King-Devick Saccade Test
- Division of Special Education/Vocational

Rehabilitation - Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), Stanford diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT), Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test (SDMT), an informal written language assessment, Microcomputer Evaluation and Screening Assessment (MESA), selected work samples from the Valpar Component Work Sample Series

Division of Social Services - a comprehensive social services interview

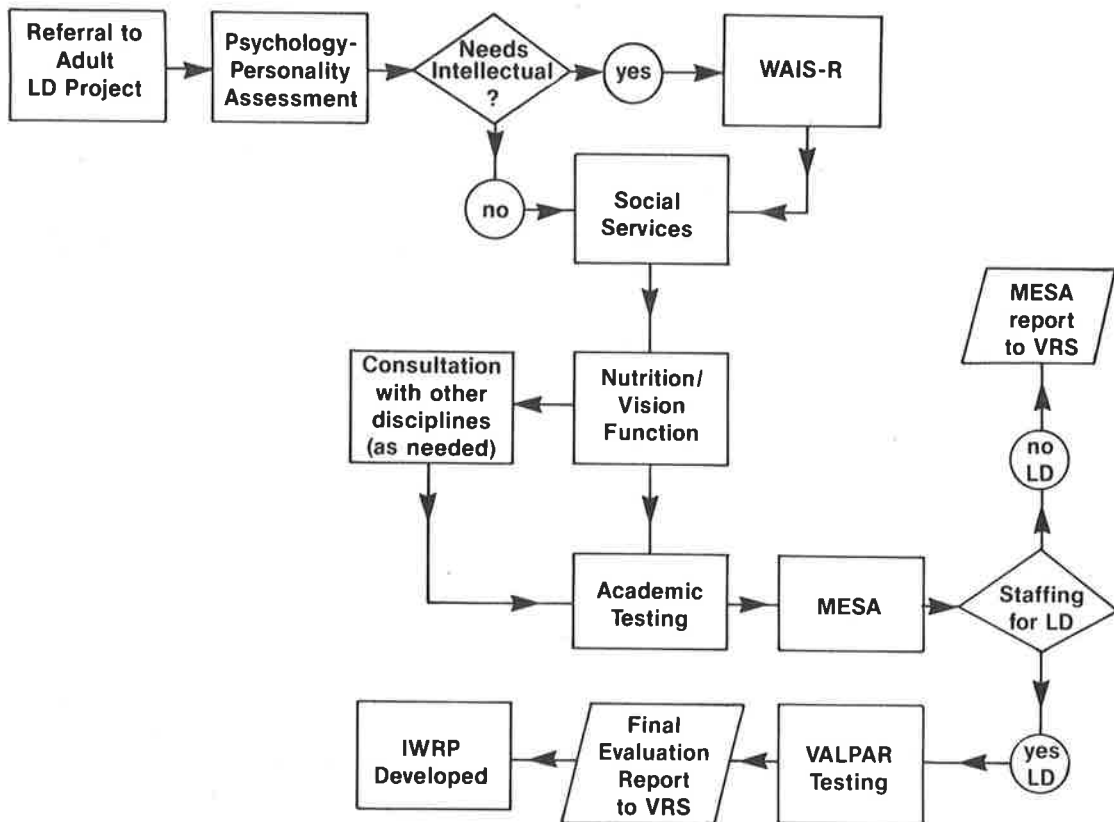
The Adult LD Project evaluation required four to six days. A group of four referrals was able to proceed through the evaluation. Divisional information obtained from the various assessments was utilized in determining the presence of a learning disability and the implications of the learning disability on the subject's personal and vocational competencies (See Figure 1).

The Division of Special Education/Vocational Rehabilitation (SE/VR) initiated the evaluation process by providing a brief orientation to the activities to be encountered in the LD Project evaluation. Included in this orientation was a brief discussion of learning disabilities and their vocational implications. After this informal orientation, testing was then initiated utilizing the Microcomputer Evaluation and Screening Assessment (MESA). Administration of the MESA yielded information regarding functional academics, eleven different aptitudes, tool use, physical mobility, general strength, vocational interest and awareness, and speaking skills. A worker profile was then generated from the preceding information. This profile was then utilized the following

day in an LD Project prestaffing to identify assessments or consultations required with other divisions and to determine appropriate work samples for further testing.

The clients then saw the Division of SE/VR and the Division of Social Services on the third day. The Division of SE/VR conducted academic testing that yielded information regarding the type of training and employment the client would be able to obtain as well as proficiency in independent living skills (banking, budgeting, consumer shopping, completing job applications, etc.). That afternoon, the division of Social Services conducted an intake interview to obtain information regarding medical history, educational training, work history, and social involvement. Social skills are observed

FIGURE 2



and any expressed anxiety or depression was further explored.

The next two days were once again devoted to testing with the Division of SE/VR to administer selected work samples from the Valpar Component Work Sample Series. The work samples yielded information regarding work behaviors and work skills. In addition, the Division of Vision Function performed evaluations that assessed visual acuity and visual perception.

The Division of Psychology and the Division of Nutrition were assigned the last day of the evaluation. The Division of Psychology provided intellectual functioning and personality factors such as depression, stress, anxiety, or aberrant behavior that may interfere with successful job performance. That afternoon, the Division of Nutrition completed an intake form regarding the client's nutritional status.

The subsequent week of an LD evaluation, test results were reviewed in a staffing to determine the presence of a learning disability. In addition, the implications of the learning disability on the client's vocational aspirations was discussed. LD Project staff would then develop recommendations regarding adjustment services, job readiness training, vocational objectives, and job placement. The evaluation results and recommendations would then be relayed to the client in a conference. The VRS counselor, the parent, and staff members from other disciplines were invited as needed. The VR counselor then utilized the evaluation results and recommendations to develop vocational objectives and formulate an Individually Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP).

Summary and Critique

Although this model provided critical information for diagnosis and vocational planning, it was evident that some changes were necessary. The cumbersome sequence of interdisciplinary evaluations was often confusing to clients as well as team members.

Further, a number of referrals to the project were later found to be not LD yet extensive resources were utilized in a comprehensive assessment. Many of these clients were more appropriate for placement elsewhere for these services. Also refinement in assessment techniques was initiated.

Although the program continued to utilize a two week timetable for evaluation, a primary alteration occurred in the sequence of interdisciplinary assessments (see Figure 2).

Other refinements in the evaluation process included changes in the educational measures utilized for assessment of academic achievement: The Test of Written Language (TOWL) was substituted for the informal sampling of written language and the WRAT was eliminated for further streamlining. In addition, vocational testing began the following week with administration of the MESA. After MESA testing concluded, an interdisciplinary staffing occurred. Review of assessment results, diagnosis of clients, and recommendations comprised the staffing agenda. Non-LD clients were remanded to VRS for further assessment services. Clients diagnosed LD returned for further vocational assessment. Interpretive conferences to review evaluation results as well as recommendations were scheduled for clients regardless of the diagnosis. Though these refinements have increased the ease and quality of vocational evaluation through the LD Project, additional changes are anticipated.

The adult LD Project utilized the interdisciplinary assessment suggested for LD adults in literature. The pervasive nature of a learning disability necessitated a multidisciplinary assessment. This multidisciplinary approach provided vital information regarding social networks and psychosocial stressors as well as other vocational assets and limitations. Results may be utilized in vocational planning and transitional services to effect successful employment.

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