

A VOCATIONAL SCREENING PROCESS FOR TRANSITIONAL PLANNING AT THE 9TH GRADE LEVEL

THOMAS A. DOWNS and ROSEANN M. CONLON

Abstract

Delaware's Transition Project is sponsored jointly by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Public Instruction under a federal grant. The purpose of the project is to develop a coordinated effort between home, school and community agencies, so as to allow for a smooth transition for special needs youth, from the school to the work environment. Transitional planning begins at the junior high school level with the development of vocational objectives, which are based on the outcomes of a comprehensive vocational screening procedure.

Throughout their educational experience, mildly to moderately handicapped students often face a variety of adverse problems and situations which require unique interventions. Unintentionally, youth do not always receive the necessary coordinated services which allow for smooth and effective transitions between programs. Gaps in communication among the student, family, school, community and state agencies may hinder the delivery of vital transitional services (Wircenski, Weatherford and Sullivan, 1985).

The Transition Project in the State of Delaware is a joint effort undertaken by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Public Instruction, and local school districts, under a federal grant, to address concerns related to handicapped youth in transition. In order to facilitate communication, cooperation and delivery of services by special education, vocational education, vocational rehabilitation, and other agencies, it was necessary to pursue the development of a procedural model. The supposition underlying the primary model was that by coordinating the efforts of agencies and service providers, the handicapped student would experience a smoother transition from the educational to the working environment.

Twenty professionals, representing a wide range of state, local and private agencies, served as the Delaware Transition Project Advisory Council. The Transition Project staff was composed of a project coordinator, two vocational rehabilitation transition counselors, two transition counselors and one clerical support person.

During the 1984-85 school year, Core teams were established at five pilot sites, which represented a cross-section of the community environments found within Delaware and which served a population, representing the majority of handicapping conditions. The Core Teams were comprised of school staff members who were responsible for special education/vocational programs, the vocational rehabilitation transition counselor, and appropriate representatives from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and/or the Division of Mental Retardation.

The Core Teams were responsible for the development of a transitional model, or procedure, which would identify the functions and responsibilities of those involved in the coordination and provision of transitional services. Each of the five pilot sites was unique, based on the resources available locally and the level of disability served.

The Delaware model, a composite of the five pilot sites, was constructed so that implementation would take place in four procedural phases. In Phase I, a Core Transition Team is identified and established at each pilot site. This Core Team could include, but was not limited to, the school's IEP team, students, parents, vocational educators, and D.V.R./D.M.R. representatives and counselors.

Phase II implementation is undertaken by the Core Transition Team, at the secondary school entry level. Here, all special education students are reviewed, with emphasis placed on extant data which is relevant to vocational planning (i.e. interests, aptitudes, and behavioral observations). A major function of the team in this phase, is to determine, plan for, and implement additional assessments, which are needed to complete each student's profile. Prior to scheduling and course selection for the subsequent year, the Core Transition Team reviews the student profile and develops a comprehensive, long-range vocational plan, which extends through graduation or age 21. This plan includes areas of behavior modification, academic considerations, and specialized programming, which may impact on the student's potential for successful employment. This long-range plan becomes a part of the student's IEP and is the responsibility of the Case Manager.

Phase III implementation occurs during the middle secondary years, when the Case Manager reviews the vocational plan as part of the IEP annual review process. The Case Manager will refer the plan back to the Core Transition Team, if the plan is inappropriate or not working, or if available services are lacking. Necessary modifications are made, so that the revised plan will provide appropriate programming services.

The final phase of implementation, or "hand-off", occurs at the beginning of the last year in high school. At this time, the team reviews all seniors and determines what follow-up or referral services are appropriate. A transitional IEP meeting is conducted with referral agency representatives in attendance, as well as the student and parent. At this meeting, all available

data are reviewed and the process of referral is determined. If additional, or updated information is needed, it will be identified and planning for the final year will be completed. The Case Manager and the agency/service representative share the responsibility for the "hand-off" year activities.

Once this procedural model was constructed, the Delaware Transition Project staff and the pilot site Core Teams were faced with a variety of decisions. On the functional level, concerns at the pilot school sites were focused toward three major issues: (1) selecting an appropriate screening device, (2) planning appropriate high school programs, and (3) encouraging student/parent involvement. Determining the type of comprehensive screening method to be used with the identified population was the major issue. The Transition Project supplied each School District Task Force with samples of six screening procedures available within the State. In Christina School District, the Task Force in conjunction with the school Core Team, chose KEVAS, an acronym for Key Education Vocational Assessment System. KEVAS was selected because it provided information which assisted the school in programming for the individual student, planning follow-up referrals and/or consideration of further assessment. KEVAS allowed each school district to evaluate the available vocational course offerings, in relation to the areas measured in the KEVAS subtests. KEVAS vocational recommendations were then made by matching the student's functional strengths and weaknesses to the vocational course profiles as defined by the district task analysis. The KEVAS screening results and recommendations were shared with the student and parent as part of the IEP process and were also reviewed with those special education and vocational teachers, who would be directly responsible for implementing the long-range vocational plan.

KEVAS is composed of a series of subtests, some of which are performed independently and some which are administered by trained examiners, using patented test equipment in a one-on-one setting (Penfield, Krass and Conlon, 1984). Administration of the system is flexible. Testing may be accomplished in one continuous 2-1/2 hr. group session, or subtests may be clustered and administered in smaller blocks of time. The KEVAS administration format has been found to be especially appropriate to the needs of the school environment, where scheduling, transportation, staffing and attendance coordination often demands flexibility. The format is also responsive to the needs of special populations, where attention is often limited and time on

task must be adjusted to accommodate this variable.

KEVAS integrates non-verbal, performance-based measures, which are portable and move easily from one test site to another. These measures have been found to be effective in assessing vocational potential, even among subjects with extremely limited reading and language skills (2nd and 3rd grade level). The equipment used within the system provides a "hands on" test experience, which is interesting and which motivates even the most unenthusiastic subjects. Included in the test program for 8th and 9th grade special needs youth are measures of: auditory acuity, auditory localization, auditory memory, visual acuity, color acuity, visual memory, hand strength, manual persistence, visual reaction time, auditory reaction time, combined visual/auditory reaction time, fine motor skills, problem-solving ability, abstract reasoning, basic language skills (including reading ability, word knowledge, reading comprehension and contextual language useage), arithmetic skills, expressed vocational interests, social competency, personality attributes and historical and demographic data.

Because KEVAS is a computer-based system, the assessment component can be used as a data management system to produce both individual results as well as group output. All test data are computer maintained and the group database is used to produce local norms, as well as descriptive statistics, on the population under study.

Group data analysis is used to identify areas of group need which may be remediated through instructional adaptation or addressed through appropriate program development or provision of support services. Analysis of data produced by a small pilot study conducted in Delaware with 9th grade special needs students, indicated that combined visual/auditory processing was the most effective group processing modality (Conlon, 1985). Based on this finding, the significance of integrating multi-modal instructional techniques and materials becomes apparent.

Presently, KEVAS is being used in Delaware as a state-wide vocational screening procedure for 8th and 9th grade special needs students. It is estimated that 850 students will be included in the sampling. Upon completion of testing in June 1986, a comprehensive analysis of the population will be undertaken so as to determine the functional patterns of the population and areas of need which can be addressed instructionally.

Thus far, school and community response to the Transition Project model has been very positive and enthusiastic. There now appears to be a means through which Delaware educators can interface with the extended community to provide necessary, in-depth, continual support services for special needs students.

Conlon, R.; (1985). Statistical Report of Findings - Delaware Transition Pilot Project, Shrewsbury, N.J., Key Education, Inc.

Penfield, D.; Krass, A.; Conlon, R.; (1984). Analysis of Key Education Instrumentation, Toronto, Canada. A paper presented at the 92nd Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association.

Wircenski, J.; Weatherford, J.W.; and Sullivan, R.; (1985). "Vocational Education: A Look Ahead", Curriculum Report. Vol.15 No.2. Reston, Va.: National Association of Secondary School Principals.

AUTHOR:

Thomas Downs
Roseanne Conlon
Key Education, Inc.
673 Broad St.
Shrewsbury, N.J. 07701

