
Personnel Development of School-based Vocational
Assessment Personnel

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Abstract

In recent years the implementation of and interest in vocational assessment of special needs students in school settings has increased dramatically, culminating in the passage of the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act which requires that a vocational assessment be performed no later than the ninth grade for handicapped and disadvantaged students who enroll in vocational education. Vocational assessment in school settings is much like vocational assessment in any setting. However, a variety of characteristics of vocational assessment in schools require a modified model of vocational assessment and consequent changes in the skills needed by vocational assessment personnel.

This article summarizes: (1) a model for the implementation of vocational assessment services in school settings developed out of a four-year national project, (2) identification of personnel involved in vocational assessment who may implement this model (including teachers, counselors, school psychologists, curriculum-based vocational assessment coordinators, and vocational evaluation specialists), (3) discussion of skills needed by such individuals to implement the model, (4) and discussion of practical implications for vocational assessment education including funding, interdepartmental cooperation at universities, and relations with state departments of education.

Introduction

In recent years vocational assessment of handicapped students has been seen as increasingly important; consequently use of vocational assessment in secondary schools has been steadily growing and trends indicate that it will continue to do so, particularly with the passage of the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act. This is creating an ever-increasing need to provide training for those involved in vocational assessment of special students in school settings. This article discusses issues relevant to personnel development related to school-based vocational assessment.

Organizational Model of Vocational Assessment

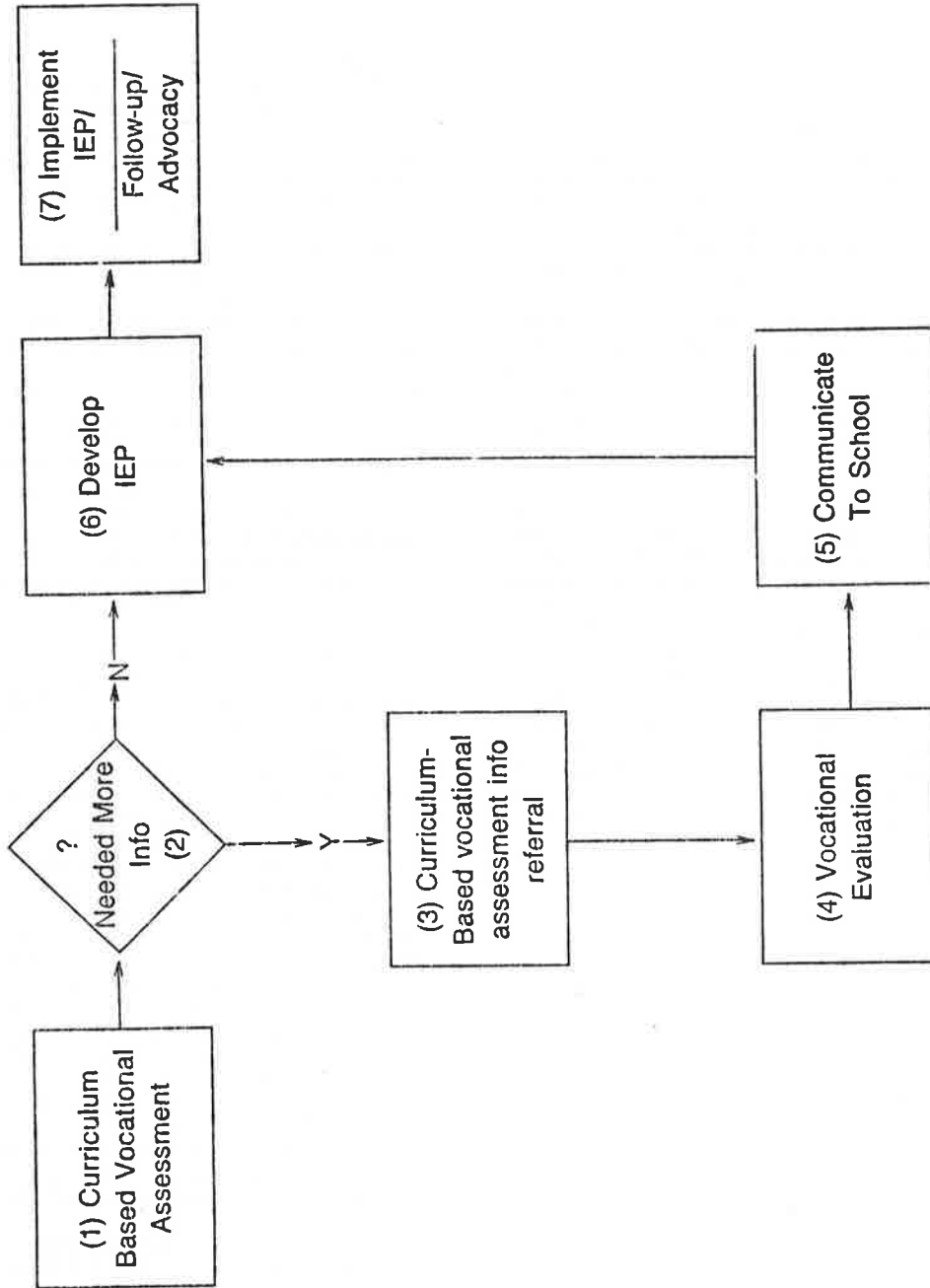
Two basic organizational approaches for vocational assessment in schools are seen in the literature: (a) curriculum-based vocational assessment, (b) vocational evaluation centers. This paper suggests using a combination of the two approaches above to draw on the strength of each and provide an on-going, developmental assessment of process. The approach is graphically illustrated in Figure 1 and is discussed below.

1. Curriculum-based vocational assessment should start in elementary school grades and be interactive with instruction. Information gathered during these years should guide development of individualized education plans relative to career orientation and exploration, prevocational skills, work behaviors, and functional living skills.

Curriculum-based vocational assessment refers to the use of existing school resources to obtain vocational assessment data about students. Such an approach has been advocated by an increasing number of writers as being a cost-effective method for obtaining vocationally relevant data from the regular school environment in a way that maximizes its likely impact on instruction and curriculum. Curriculum-based vocational assessment is usually considered to begin no later than late elementary school and to continue through the student's public school career. During the vocational and career development of the student, information is gathered at the various stages of orientation, exploration, and preparation. It is used to develop educational plans that facilitate career education and vocational development.

2. At major vocational decision points, such as the year prior to potential entrance into vocational education, the interdisciplinary team decides if more information is needed. If so, additional vocational assessment is scheduled which may include referral to a Vocational Evaluation Center. More information should be sought if information is not adequate to inform the vocational teacher on how to work with a student, if it is unclear that a student has the ability to succeed in a vocational program, or if teachers or parents feel that vocational assessment infor-

FIGURE 1
COMPREHENSIVE, DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO SCHOOL-BASED
VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT



mation available does not adequately reflect the real abilities of the student.

3. If more information is needed a referral to a Vocational Evaluation Center is made. The "Curriculum-based Vocational Assessment Specialist" will then compile vocational assessment data gathered to date. This helps Vocational Evaluation Specialists to not duplicate information already gathered and to focus in on what yet needs to be done. A referral should also specify what type of information is needed and what vocational assessment questions must be answered. A case coordinator, usually a teacher or counselor, should be available to verbally clarify referral information and assessment questions.

4. A vocational evaluation is implemented that is based on the needs of the student. Using a center should include visits to vocational classes, interviews with teachers, and vocational classroom tryouts when laboratory classes are considered or job tryouts for cooperative vocational education programs. Such centers may be based in schools, rehabilitation facilities or other organizations.

5. Active methods are used to communicate vocational assessment information to instructional personnel so that educational plans and individual classroom plans may be based on this information. Minimally, a comprehensive report must be developed that is available to all who work with a student. Additional mechanisms have also been helpful. These include: (1) interdisciplinary team meetings following vocational evaluation, (2) development of summary reports sent to teachers and parents outlining results and implications and (3) use of liaison vocational assessment counselors who help interpret vocational assessment results in meetings at a student's home school.

6. Advocacy and Consultation. Vocational assessment personnel should follow-up on recommendations made in vocational assessment, advocate for student involvement in vocational education and provision of appropriate support services, and give needed consultation and vocational teachers, special education teachers, and other educators.

Personnel in Vocational Assessment

Trained staff must be available to implement and use vocational assessment results. Personnel functions include: (1) vocational assessment team members; (2) a curriculum-based vocational assessment coordinator; and (3) a vocational evaluation specialist. These functions are discussed briefly below.

Vocational assessment team members. A variety of persons should provide input into vocational assessment. Multiple observations of students in various situations have been shown to increase validity of assessment results. Team members may include: teachers, parents, coaches, physical education teachers, special and vocational education teachers, counselors, rehabilitation counselors, etc. These team members must be given guidance in how to provide effective

input into the vocational assessment process and effectively use vocational assessment results.

Curriculum-based vocational assessment coordinator. Some individual must be assigned the responsibility for coordinating curriculum-based vocational assessment. This function does not necessarily require a full-time position but may well be part of the job description of a special education teacher, counselor, school psychologist, or a vocational evaluation specialist. One individual initially must be responsible for coordinating the design of the overall curriculum-based vocational assessment process and training team members in its use. This responsibility includes: analysis of vocational skills in the school curriculum and requirements of jobs and vocational programs; selection and development of checklists, skill assessment forms, performance samples, and other assessment tools; development of a simple synthesis and reporting format; training staff to use assessment methods and efficiently record observations; and training staff to use information to develop career and vocational education instructional plans to students. This individual must be especially skilled in vocational assessment. Vocational counselors or school psychologists who have had training in vocational assessment or a vocational evaluation specialists may fill this function. A trained vocational evaluation specialist, however, should always be consulted in the development of the program. Once the process is developed, a variety of individuals might be designated to collect and coordinate this process for a particular group of students. For instance, a Chapter I or special education teacher could assist in collecting information on the students with whom they work.

Vocational evaluation specialist. Full-time vocational evaluation specialists must be available to work in Vocational Evaluation Centers as described above. Vocational evaluation specialists and curriculum-based coordinators have some overlapping functions. Vocational evaluation specialists must be especially knowledgeable concerning requirements of vocational education programs, other vocational training programs, and local jobs. They will interpret curriculum-based vocational assessment, develop individualized vocational evaluation plans, administer, score, and interpret results of vocational assessment instruments especially psychological tests, work samples, vocational classroom and job tryouts, and other methods that utilize work, real or simulated as the focal point of assessment. Vocational evaluation specialists should be highly trained in vocational assessment techniques via graduate education.

Certification/Licensure of Vocational Assessment Personnel

State licensure/certification of vocational evaluation specialists is problematic in many states. In too many cases certification is tied to existing standards for positions with requirements minimally related to skills needed by vocational evaluation specialists. This problem must be solved if students are to be provided effective services. Presently, many skilled evaluators cannot be hired by schools because of such problems

while individuals who fit certification requirements in unrelated areas fill such positions.

What is needed are hiring and certification standards that are built around the actual requirements of the job that allow hiring of those with the most skills and encourage skill improvement by those who enter this field with little training. The Certification Commission for Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES) has developed standards for vocational evaluation specialists. This is a professional certification rather than a licensure procedure. However, requiring vocational evaluators to be certified will assure that at least minimal standards of education and training are met. These standards may also be used as a basis for developing local hiring and state certification standards.

Competencies of School-based Vocational Assessment Personnel

While many knowledges and skills of vocational assessment personnel in school and rehabilitation settings are common, it would appear that important differences exist as well. These are particularly related to the following factors: (1) curriculum-based vocational assessment as a longitudinal assessment process is not used in rehabilitation facilities; (2) persons at earlier ages and developmental levels are involved; (3) vocational education and special education have unique structures that are different from rehabilitation agencies.

Competencies that appear to be important include:

- *policies and procedures of vocational education and special education
- *functional limitations of disability
- *occupational information and career exploration and counseling techniques
- *career development processes
- *job/vocational training analysis
- *interviewing and counseling skills
- *learning style assessment techniques
- *individualized vocational assessment planning procedures
- *psychometric testing that includes vocational aptitude, interest, career awareness, and dexterity assessment
- *work sample selection and use that includes commercial work samples and locally developed work samples
- *design and coordination of informal vocational assessment techniques
- *situational assessment including behavioral observation in controlled work settings, vocational classroom tryouts, and on-the-job tryouts
- *interpretation and report writing which includes development of recommendations for instructional and support service personnel
- *assessment of job related functional living skills - transportation, etc.

*environmental adaptation and vocational curriculum modification

Personnel Development in Vocational Assessment

Training is needed both for (1) Vocational Evaluation Specialists and for (2) members of the vocational assessment team. Both graduate training and in-service is needed.

Universities should provide the primary training for vocational assessment specialists. Such training should be developed cooperatively between university departments of counselor education (rehabilitation), vocational education, and special education provided by personnel who are themselves qualified in the vocational assessment of special needs students. Interdisciplinary degrees should be developed, and additional course work should be available for persons currently having teacher certification who wish to function as Vocational Evaluation Specialists. Courses should be available for counselors, special education teachers, etc., so that team members develop some awareness of vocational evaluation in their pre-service programs. In-service should be offered on a continuing basis for both specialists and team members. In-service, initially, will be the most effective mode of training team members in local schools.

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