

SCHOOL-BASED VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT: A COMPREHENSIVE, DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

MICHAEL PETERSON

ABSTRACT: In the last fifteen years, as special needs students have been increasingly involved in career education and vocational education programs, utilization of vocational assessment has increased. However, while models have been developed and solidified in rehabilitation (Nadolsky, 1972, 1973; Baker & Mercer, 1974), models for vocational evaluation and assessment of special needs students in school settings are still in great flux. There are significant questions and disagreements concerning; what is to be assessed, for what purpose, what recommendations and other outcomes should be available, who is assessed, by whom, when assessment is to be done, when it is implemented, and how often (Peterson, 1981, 1983).

Two basic approaches are seen in the literature: (a) curriculum-based vocational assessment, (b) vocational evaluation centers. It is the purpose of this article to briefly describe each approach, consider the strengths and weaknesses of each, and to propose an eclectic model that provides a comprehensive, developmental approach to vocational assessment that combines the most useful aspects of each model.

Curriculum-Based Vocational Assessment

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 (Stodden, 1980; Clark, 1972; Patten, 1981; Posey, 1982; Peterson, 1980; Sitlington, 1978; Phelps, 1984). 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 (Phelps, 1984) and used to develop IEP's that facilitate career education and vocational development.

The methods used to gather information in curriculum-based vocational assessment are multiple and varied. The fact is that a rich source of assessment data is available in school settings. However, such information is most often not interpreted in light of vocational development. Methods may include those listed in Table 1.

Curriculum-based vocational assessment has both significant advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, gathering vocational assessment information from existing curriculum and special education testing procedures can be very cost effective. On the other hand, the danger exists that, depending upon the pre-vocational and exploration curricula of a particular school, a student may not have an opportunity to manifest vocationally relevant skills and interests.

Implementing curriculum-based vocational assessment also requires attention to personnel considerations.

Some individual--whether a full-time vocational assessment specialist, vocational counselor, school psychologist--with both the time and skills in vocational assessment must coordinate the process. This individual must be actively involved in setting up a process, training teachers and counselors to use checklists and other instruments, and helping educators to use information to develop IEP's.

Table 1

Methods of Curriculum-based Vocational Assessment

Special Education Classes

- *Checklists of vocational and prevocational skills
- *Interest assessment
- *Student and parent interviews

School Records

Special Education Testing and Assessment

- *Psychological, educational, social
- *May include interest and aptitude assessment

Prevocational Classes

Checklists of interest and vocational skills from:

- *industrial arts
- *homemaking
- *occupational orientation, etc.

Physical Education Classes

- *Checklists of physical skills

Vocational Education Classes

- *Performance assessment
- *Vocational classroom tryouts

Vocational Evaluation Center Model

Vocational Evaluation Centers involve a centralized location where in-depth vocational assessment and counseling occurs. Vocational Evaluation Centers may serve a regional area, be housed in mobile units, or be implemented in coordination with other agencies. Methods usually emphasize the utilization of "work, real or simulated, as the focal point of assess-

ment" (VEWAA, 1975) including: career exploration, vocational aptitude and interest testing, physical skills assessment, work samples, and situational assessment including vocational classroom tryouts and job tryouts.

The actual process for centers located in schools is very similar to that described by Nadolsky (1972). However, some significant differences occur. These include a greater emphasis on vocational evaluation to recommend skills training (Pertri, 1980; Peterson, 1981), utilization of vocational classroom tryouts and work samples based on vocational training programs (Wrobel, 1976; Lake, 1974), and utilization of vocational evaluation as part of a comprehensive support service approach for special needs students (Leconte & Roebuck, 1981). Specific examples include Project Serve (Wrobel, 1976) and Vocational Support Service Teams utilized in Maryland (Marshall, Emerson, & Bailey, 1981). Laconte and Roebuck (1981) described vocational evaluation as implemented in Maryland schools as having an advocacy role in which the results of vocational evaluation are actively communicated to parents and educators and follow-up concerning the implementation of recommendations from the vocational evaluation process is provided.

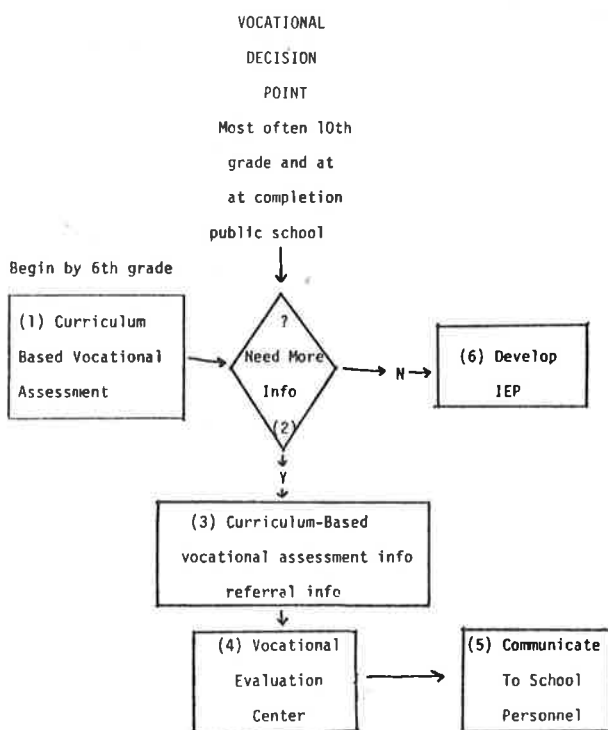
Vocational evaluation centers also have significant advantages and disadvantages. They potentially provide an extremely valuable opportunity for students to experience a variety of occupations and be assessed relative to skills needed in those occupations. Such programs have been shown to have dramatic impact on student attitudes, motivation, and self-concept (Menz, 1978). Additionally, vocational evaluation specialists act as highly competent special service personnel who can advocate for appropriate services for handicapped students (Leconte & Roebuck, 1981). On the other hand, Vocational Evaluation Centers are expensive and can be too far removed from actual instructional personnel.

Comprehensive, Developmental Approach to School-based Vocational Assessment

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 process. The approach is graphically illustrated in Figure 1 and can be summarized as follows:

Figure 1

Comprehensive, Developmental Approach to School-Based Vocational Assessment



1. Curriculum-based vocational assessment should start in the sixth grade and be interactive with instruction. Information gathered during these years should guide IEP development relative to career orientation and exploration, prevocational skills, work behaviors, and functional living skills.

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 or if it is unclear or doubtful that a student has the ability to succeed in a vocational program.

3. If a referral is made, the "Curriculum-based Vocational Assessment Specialist" will compile vocational assessment data gathered to date and provide specific assessment questions. This helps center personnel to not duplicate information already gathered and to focus in on what yet needs to be done.

4. A vocational evaluation is implemented that is based on the needs of the student. Note that using a center does not at all prevent the use of vocational classroom tryouts, job tryouts, etc., as part of the evaluation process. Such methods have been used to especially good advantages in school situations (Wrobel, 1978).

5. Active methods are used to communicate vocational assessment information to instructional personnel so that IEP's and individual classroom plans may be based on this information. Various mechanisms have been used for this purpose. These include: (1) interdisciplinary team meetings following vocational evaluation, (2) development of summary reports sent to teachers and parents outlining results and implications (Patten, 1981), (3) use of liaison vocational assessment counselors who help interpret vocational assessment results in IEP meetings at a student's home school, and (4) follow-up on recommendations made in vocational evaluation reports (Leconte & Roebuck, 1981).

Vocational assessment--whether curriculum-based or in vocational Evaluation Centers--must pay attention to several key principals. These include:

(1) Use of work, real or simulated. The more like real work, the more valid and useful are the results.

(2) Assessment must be instructionally relevant. Student learning styles and abilities must be assessed and clear pictures of student strengths and needs must be developed using a program related assessed model. Thus vocational assessment should result in recommendations that include program placement, data for specific objectives in a program, and suggestions for useful instructional and behavior change techniques. More specifically, recommendations may include: vocational education programs, job placement, support services and community programs, teaching techniques and vocational curriculum modifications, vocational information and exploration experiences, work adjustment training, academic course selection and functional living skills training (Peterson & Hill, 1982).

Several writers have attempted to blend a model of vocational assessment that utilizes the strengths of both curriculum-based vocational assessment and vocational evaluation centers. To this end, the Texas Education Agency (1979) developed guidelines concerning vocational assessment in which three levels of assessment were described: (a) Level 1 Vocational Assessment involved the use of existing student records and diagnostic data such as special education assessment, (b) Level 2 involved the use of basic vocational interest and vocational aptitude assessment, and (c) Level 3 was entitled "Comprehensive Vocational Assessment," or "Vocational Evaluation." Peterson and Hill (1982) in Project Voc-AIM developed a manual for the Texas Education Agency that described for public schools the methods used to implement this process of vocational assessment. Peterson (1984) working with a national task force on vocational assessment of special needs students, developed a monograph which described a "basic vocational assessment" and "comprehensive vocational assessment."

Pennsylvania (Department of Education, 1983) developed a process of curriculum-based vocational assessment which also allowed the incorporation of vocational evaluation centers as needed. Posey (1982), and others, described a similar model for use in Arizona.

Personnel in School-Based Vocational Assessment

To implement the comprehensive model described above requires trained personnel. Vocational Evaluation Specialists must be available to vocational evaluation centers and trained personnel must function as curriculum-based vocational assessment specialists. Depending upon specific school situations, these functions could be performed by the same person.

Table 2

Personnel Roles in a Comprehensive, Developmental Approach to School-Based Vocational Assessment

Vocational Assessment Specialist	Curriculum-Based	Vocational Evaluation Center
*Vocational Counselor	Analyze vocational skills in school curriculum	Analyze requirements of jobs, voc ed classes, etc.
*Vocational School Psychologist	Develop and coordinate input by teachers, parents, etc.	Assess students using tests, work samples
*Work study coordinator		
*Rehabilitation evaluator		
		--Coordinate vocational-- class tryouts
		--Consult with teachers-- and parents concerning vocational IEPs, support services, curriculum modifications
		--Analyze and interpret-- vocational assessment information

(table continues)

Table 2 (cont.)

School-Based Vocational Assessment Team	Curriculum Based	Vocational Evaluation Center
Special Education Teacher	Assess vocationally relevant skills	
Vocational Education Teacher, etc.	Use results to help develop career oriented IEP	Use results to develop vocational IEP

Additionally, vocational counselors, school psychologists, or other appropriate school personnel could implement and coordinate curriculum-based vocational assessment. Clearly, however, such individuals must have skills in vocational assessment. The roles and functions of curriculum-based and vocational evaluation center-based assessment specialists are similar; but there are some differences. These are indicated in Table 2. Finally, assessment team members--teachers, counselors, school psychologists, etc.--must be trained both to participate in the vocational assessment process and to use its results in IEP development.

Relation of Special Education Assessment and Vocational Assessment

A final important note should be made that vocational assessment and existing special education assessment should be overlapping, coordinated processes. Too often these are developing as two, uncoordinated systems implemented by two sets of personnel who may or may not actively communicate. The vocational school psychologist movement (Hohenshil, Shepard, Capps, 1982) may assist in the development of a coordinated system. At least one vocational evaluation center (Patten, 1981) has been staffed by school psychologists who are also trained Vocational

Evaluation Specialists. When vocational evaluation is implemented, assuming the schedule is appropriate, a student's re-evaluation is implemented for special education.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of a comprehensive, developmental approach to school-based vocational assessment. The purpose of the model outlined in this paper is to actualize an assessment system to provide data upon which vocationally oriented IEP's may be developed in a cost-efficient manner and in a way that maximizes the opportunities available to handicapped students. The result will be better services and ultimate employment for handicapped students.

REFERENCES

- Baker, R., & Mercer, F. (Eds.). (1974). Proceedings on the region IV conference on adjustment services. Auburn, AL: Auburn University, Rehabilitation Services Education.
- Clark, G. (1972). Prevocational evaluation in secondary special education work study programs. Lawrence, KS: School of Education, University of Kansas.
- Cobb, B. (1983). Curriculum based vocational assessment. Teaching Exceptional Children, 15(4), 216-219.
- Department of Education. (1983). Vocational education evaluation and assessment process for special needs handicapped students. Menomonee: Materials Development Center, University of Wisconsin-Stout.
- Hohenshil, T., Shepard, J., & Capps, C. F. (1982, Spring). Vocational school psychology: Serving special needs students. The Journal for Vocational Special needs Education, 4(3).
- Lake, T. (Ed.). (1974). Career education: Exemplary programs for the handicapped. Vermont: Capital City Press.
- Leconte, P., & Roebuck, E. (1981,

- November 21). Vocational assessment: Change agent and advocate in secondary public schools. Presentation at International Conference on the Career Development of Handicapped Individuals, Dallas, TX.
- McCarthy, I., & Leconte, P. (1983). Certification of vocational evaluators in public schools. Unpublished paper.
- Marshall, D., Emerson, M., & Bailey, D. (1981, November 21). Continuum of services to special needs students: Vocational evaluation and support services team approach. Presentation at Conference on the Career Development of Exceptional Individuals, Dallas, TX.
- Menz, F. (1978). Vocational evaluation with adolescents: Description and evaluation of a program with reluctant learners. Menomonee: University of Wisconsin-Stout.
- Nadolsky, J. (1971). Development of a model for vocational evaluation of the disadvantaged. Auburn, AL: School of Education, Auburn University.
- Patten, M. (1981, Fall). Components of the prevocational/vocational evaluation. Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 4(3), 81-87.
- Peterson, M. (1980). Vocational assessment: Considerations for program development. Carrollton, TX: Carrollton-Farmer's Branch Independent School System.
- Peterson, M. (1983). Survey of members of the national association of vocational special needs personnel concerning vocational assessment. Unpublished paper. Mississippi State University.
- Peterson, M. (1981, Fall). Developing a model of vocational assessment for use in public schools in Texas. Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Bulletin, 14,(3), 100-107.
- Peterson, M., Bodenhammer, E., & McLeod, P. (1980). Vocational assessment and evaluation: A review. Denton: North Texas State University.
- Peterson, M., & Hill, P. (1982). Vocational assessment of students with special needs: An implementation manual. Commerce: Occupational Curriculum Laboratory, East Texas State University.
- Peterson, M. (Ed.). (1984). Vocational assessment of special needs students: A conceptual model. Mississippi State: Mississippi State University.
- Petrie, L. (1984). Vocational assessment. Unpublished paper. Minneapolis, MN: Vocational-Technical Division, State Department of Education.
- Phelps, L. A., & McCarthy, T. (1984, Spring). Student assessment practices. Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 7(3), 30-38.
- Posey, V. (1982). Arizona model for vocational assessment: A procedural guide. Tucson: University of Arizona.
- Sitlington, P. (1979). Vocational assessment and training of the handicapped. Focus on Exceptional Children, (4).
- Stodden, R. A. (1980). Vocational assessment for special needs individuals. Workshop report to participants at State Invitational Model Building Workshop, Farmington, MA.
- Texas Education Agency. (1980). Guidelines for vocational assessment of the handicapped. Austin, TX: Department of Occupational Education and Technology and Department of Special Education.
- Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association. (1975). Vocational evaluation project: Final report. Menomonee, WI: Materials Development Center.
- Wrobel, C. (1978). Vocational education for special needs: Project serve. White Bear Lake, MN.

Author

Michael Peterson, Director
 Rehabilitation Education Program
 Mississippi State University
 College of Education
 Drawer GE
 Mississippi State, MS 39762