

**SHORT TERM TRAINING OF VOCATIONAL  
ASSESSMENT PERSONNEL: KEEPING APACE  
WITH THE CHANGING PROFESSION**

**COLLEEN FOX ESSER**

**ABSTRACT:** Training is an important professional issue. Because of the growth and diversity of the field, the shrinking of federal support, and an increasing demand the field of training is becoming increasingly complex. This paper looks at some of the most relevant training issues for the field of vocational assessment.

In 1975, the Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association (VEWAA) published the Vocational Evaluation Project Final Report, the culmination of a three-year study which was sponsored by VEWAA and funded by a grant from RSA. The purpose of the project was to "attain and publish a professional consensus" with respect to a number of areas of concern in the field of work evaluation. The task force involved identified: the unique features, processes, and tools of work evaluation; the skills needed to provide work evaluation services; and the target population that such services could effectively serve. In addition, the study addressed the need for development of standards for work evaluation services, and attempted to define the role of the professional evaluator. The Final Report was a document which described the "state-of-the-art" of vocational evaluation at the point in time and served the field well in terms of defining and clarifying concepts and in raising important issues of our profession.

Now, in 1984, VEWAA has undertaken the sponsorship of another "state-of-the-art" project in the form of the National Forum on Issues in Vocational Assessment." Although the same types of demographic data will not be generated by the conference as was by the 1975 study, it is interesting to note the topics being presented as current issues and to make some comparisons with the issues of 1975.

The first section of the 1975 study took a look at vocational evaluation in the human services delivery system, but dealt almost exclusively with it as a service of the state vocational rehabilitation services system. Much discussion was devoted to definitions, goals, and objectives of vocational evaluation.

Today, 1984, there is still a concern with the development of vocational assessment theories, models, and applications, with the provision of quality services in an effective

and efficient manner, and with the need for the continued development of a body of knowledge and research activities to validate our methods. Today our profession has expanded into many new areas of service and vocational evaluators are now found in settings somewhat different than nine years ago. Thus the demand for better research is even more critical than in 1975.

In an attempt to identify a "typical" client, the 1975 study collected data which showed that 64% of the clients served were referred to facilities by the state vocational rehabilitation agency and the primary handicapping conditions of clients served was mental retardation. Although similar data is not available today, it is certain that there is much greater diversity in our clientele. Vocational evaluators are now assessing school-aged populations as well as elderly persons; clients with closed head injuries, chronic mental illness, learning disabilities, chronic mental illness, learning disabilities, chronic pain, and industrial injuries. Follow-up of recent graduates of Stout's Master's program find many still employed in rehabilitation facilities; however, others are now working secondary and post-secondary school settings, correctional institutions, in private-for-profit rehabilitation agencies, insurance companies, hospitals, and private industry.

Finally, the VEWAA study took a look at the role of the vocational evaluator and generated some descriptive data on persons in the field at that time. In 1975, most vocational evaluators were hired with little or no formal training in vocational evaluation. Most were trained either through short term training, in-service training, or by a method referred to as a "learn-while-you-earn OJT." Eighty seven percent of the survey respondents worked in private non-profit rehabilitation settings. Certification of vocational evaluators was suggested as a means of upgrading the profession.

The greater variety of settings in which evaluators are employed today has already been mentioned, but it would appear that many practicing vocational evaluators in rehabilitation facilities are still not formally trained, at least not at the Master's level. The variety of settings and opportunities for graduates of existing pre-service programs has made it difficult to meet the demand in the field.

The VEWAA Study of 1975 was important in identifying issues of an emerging profession. It also documented the need for training of vocational evaluators and helped training programs such as Stout's short-term training program structure the content of their programs. Training is still an important professional issue today. However, given the growth and diversity of the field, the diminishing federal resources, and increased demand for training, it is a more complex issue and needs to be carefully looked at. The remainder of this paper will address some of those training issues for the field of vocational assessment.

## Settings

### School-Based Assessment Programs

Vocational evaluation in schools was minimally addressed in the 1975 VEWAA Project Final Report. However, in one section which summarized comments by leaders of related fields, school personnel expressed somewhat of an interest in the evaluation process and encouraged further development and communication. Interestingly enough, one Office of Education representative suggested that the term vocational evaluation should be replaced by vocational "assessment" or "appraisal." In general, however, evaluation in schools settings was minor area of concern.

Obviously, times have changed. Issues related to assessment in schools are of major concern to the 1984

conference. Legislative mandates as well as changes in philosophy and consumer expectations have caused both secondary and post-secondary educational institutions to identify and provide for "special needs" of their disabled students. The need for better assessment capabilities was recognized by school personnel who found that vocational programming was far more complex when severe disability and societal attitudes toward disabilities were considered (Stewart, 1980).

To date, many states have developed models of vocational assessment for their special needs students, and the federal emphasis during the past four years on "transition-from-school-to-work" suggests that many more states and/or school districts will be studying vocational rehabilitation and vocational evaluation techniques in order to adapt them effectively to their needs. McDaniel in Volume VIII, Number 6, of Rehabilitation Brief, stated that the Commission on Certification of Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES) estimated that the potential for certified vocational evaluators is eight times higher in school setting than in rehabilitation settings.

The issues for training become quite obvious and, indeed, somewhat overwhelming. As with rehabilitation facilities, some school systems will hire trained, certified evaluators, where many other will rely on in-service and short-term training to upgrade the skills of existing staff.

Noll (1978) found that tasks performed by evaluators in the schools he studies were virtually the same as those performed by evaluators in rehabilitation facilities. However, certain knowledges and skills are critical and need special emphasis in training school-based evaluators.

For example, services in schools are generally designed to facilitate the career development process (Rehabilitation Brief, April, 1983). Assessment programs must be developed along a career development model rather than

a medical model as often happens in vocational rehabilitation services. Evaluators must understand the various stages of career development in order to develop appropriate assessment strategies to address needs of specific age groups, for example 7th graders as opposed to 12th graders.

Training programs must also take into account that school-based evaluators work with numerous other parties aside from their students who may not be familiar with vocational assessment techniques. They must be able to explain evaluation results to teachers, both special and vocational education, counselors, administrators, patients, work study coordinators, etc. Evaluators in schools are also part of a multi-disciplinary team who all contribute to the development and implementation of the IEP. Team building, problem-solving and superior communication skills are then required.

Vocational exploration activities are an extremely important part of school-based assessment programs. School evaluators need thorough knowledge of occupational information resources and vocational exploration systems. A knowledge of community resources, and a thorough understanding of occupational requirements and trends.

School-based assessment programs, particularly those located in post-secondary settings, often are used to identify appropriate vocational training program choices or alternatives. Evaluators are asked to assess skills, abilities, and interests in relation to existing vocational training programs. Thus, an understanding of vocational education in general, as well as requirements of specific vocational education programs is a needed competency.

Peterson (1981) suggest that well trained evaluators can promote cost effectiveness in school programs by developing local work samples and using existing school resources rather than purchasing expensive commercial vocational evaluation systems. Training programs may need

to place extra emphasis on work sample development and norming procedures.

Trainers of school based evaluators must be aware of the variety of school-based models. McCray (1982) describes six models:

- 1) Assessment in special education classrooms
- 2) Assessment in occupational exploration classes
- 3) Integrated vocational assessment
- 4) Vocational evaluation center
- 5) Contracted vocational assessment
- 6) Mobile evaluation units

Although evaluator competencies are fairly constant across programs, each model presents differing problems and concerns.

In summary, school based assessment programs and the needs of evaluators in those programs offer a variety of training issues to be considered. Certainly, there are others not mentioned here, but in general the literature suggests that such evaluators need to develop competencies in the general areas required by CCWAVES certification. However, they also need an understanding of career development, special education, and vocational education (Peterson, 1981); knowledge of federal legislation as well as local resources and concerns: team work ability; and ability to adapt traditional vocational rehabilitation practices to a school population and settings. Short-term and in-service training programs should be designed accordingly.

### **Private Sector**

It is not surprising that "private-for-profit" rehabilitation was not mentioned in the 1975 Final Report. The growth of the field of private practice in rehabilitation has been one of the major developments of the 1980's, and where the vocational evaluator fits into this field certainly is one of the more interesting issues to be discussed. The Fall/1983 VEWA Bulletin devoted an entire issue on private practice of vocational evaluation

and in it a number training issues emerged.

In her introductory comments, Ellis (1983) expresses a concern for the lack of preparation for evaluators offered by pre-service training programs. Sink and King (1983) state that there are a "few evaluators in the private sector who devote full time to vocational evaluation", and suggest a private sector evaluator needs skills and competencies common to both evaluators and counselors.

Mason (1983) addressed work evaluation from an industrial perspective and suggests that rehabilitation specialists in the setting need training in human resource management, labor relations, prevention and safety management, and general business. Articles by May and Brandon (1983) address the vocational evaluator as an expert vocational witness which raises questions of what skills are needed in the courtroom. The diversity of viewpoints reflects the scope and diversity of issues surrounding private practice rehabilitation.

As a professional involved in short-term training of evaluators for a number of years, I can recall few issues of more controversy than that of the role of federally funded training programs in the training of practitioners for the private sector. Aside from the obvious issues of needed competencies and required modifications of technology and process, the greater question has been where and on whom should we expand our limited training resources. On the one hand, there is still, and will be for some time, a great need for trained evaluators for the traditional rehabilitation facility settings (Menz, 1983). On the other hand, the demand and market is there for training of private practice personnel.

The Research and Training Center at Stout has chosen to focus in its training efforts in this area on evaluators in rehabilitation facilities who are assessing industrially injured workers referred by private practice

rehabilitation specialists or insurance companies. These evaluators generally have had experience working with the more traditional facility clientele and evaluation programs and are now dealing with a different population, referral sources, and expectations. Our needs assessment for this program suggested training in the following areas:

- Understanding of private sector rehabilitation/workers compensation
- Adaptation of traditional evaluation tools for industrially injured
- Shorter term evaluation
- Job modification and job restructuring
- Vocational expert testimony
- Marketing evaluation services
- Communication skills
- Working with employers

### Rehabilitation Facilities

Even though it is exciting to see the changes in our profession, it is important to remember that traditional rehabilitation facilities are still the primary employers of vocational evaluators. In his 1983 study of Manpower Needs in Rehabilitation Facilities: 1980-1990, Menz projected that there will be a 97% increase in demand for evaluators in facilities by 1990. Even without the expansion into other settings, the implication of these projections for training resources is challenging to say the least. Newly funded pre-service training at the graduate level will certainly provide for some of the need. However, sheer numbers indicate a continued need for "fundamentals" training for facilities who are unable to hire graduate evaluators. Basic short-term programs must continue to be offered to train evaluators in the vocational evaluation process, tools, and techniques. Such training continues to be a high priority for Stout RTC. However, as the field matures and expands, we have found that training needs for experienced vocational evaluators

must also be addressed. The following sections will address some perspectives on those needs.

### Issues of New Client Populations

Just as the setting for vocational evaluation services has changed since 1975, so has the client populations with which we deal. Participants in all of our short-term training programs are asked to complete a "problem identification" for indicating specific client or program problems they wish to discuss in the training program. These forms along with requests from the field for specialized training constitute an informal, continuous needs assessment for our programs. A number of issues and trends have emerged from these requests. A client population which appears to be of concern to our participants at present are those with traumatic head injuries. Dealing with the complexities of assessing such a population is certainly an important issue for short-term training programs.

In an excellent and informative article in the Spring, 1983, VEWAA Bulletin, "Issues Relevant to the Vocational Evaluation of the Traumatically Head Injured Client," Musante suggests that the primary problems of assessing this population are:

- 1) Difficulty in estimating function given inconsistencies in performance
- 2) The expression of anger as a natural reaction to the evaluation process
- 3) Inherent problems in using standardized tests and work samples
- 4) The need for non-static evaluations over a longer period of time.

Musante suggest that it is more important for evaluators to assess ability to compensate for deficits than to make specific employment recommendations and stresses that a "team approach" is essential as

well as creativity and problem-solving. Evaluators working with this population have been able to find relevant training in the medical aspects of this disability, but not as often in vocational aspects, especially effective assessment techniques. Addressing these needs will require a "pooling" of knowledge between those with medical expertise and those with vocational skills and knowledge, as well as an identification of practitioners who on a day-to-day basis are discovering suitable methods and technology.

Another client population which is of special concern to our participants are those persons with chronic mental illness. As with many severely disabled persons, experienced evaluators suggest a multiplicity of techniques and a team approach. Beley and Felker (1981) developed a program which required close cooperation between psychologist and evaluator and a combination of assessment tools, in a three week evaluation to answer referral questions. Issues identified by the authors include the need to observe behavior over a period of time due to the variability of the effect of chronic mental illness on behavior, dealing with societal fears; and the effects of secondary manifestations of the disability such as passive dependent behavior learned in an institution.

Cubelli (1970) feels that it is the attitude of rehabilitation workers which becomes critical. "The tendency of mental patients to regress, recompensate, and regress again" can be extremely disconcerting to the evaluator. Evaluators who have been trained to assess objective data, Cubelli states, must also be ready to evaluate more subjective forces which he terms "readiness to work." In other words, assessment of motivation and ability to function independently and relate to others takes precedence over assessment of work skills.

Evaluators who work with these disability groups as well those who work with individuals who are learning disabled or severely developmentally

disabled require training focused not only on assessment techniques, but on the use and modification of those techniques to effectively serve their clients. In some cases, we have included units to address these concerns as part of our regular programs. Others, such as assessment of closed head injury clients will require a free-standing program to deal effectively with the complex issues.

In any assessment program which deals with clients who are severely handicapped, training programs need to emphasize teamwork. Interestingly enough, the 1975 report devoted a whole section to "the Evaluator Team Approach" stressing the evaluator's need for skills in communications, group dynamics and group decision-making. Again and again in the review of literature for this paper, the concept of teamwork was emphasized for effective assessment and rehabilitation programming of severely disabled clients.

#### Issues of Professionalism

Much has been written since 1975 regarding the "professionalism" of vocational evaluators particularly over the issue of certification. Amid discussion regarding the presence of a systematic body of knowledge, professional authority and culture, and ethical codes, the certification process was established and is now a reality. At present more than 580 person are certified as vocational evaluators as the grandfathering period comes to a close. Now in 1984, the question is no longer whether or not we are a profession, but how to enhance that professionalism. Training can be involved in that enhancement in a number of ways.

Of course, the obvious is that training (hopefully) upgrades skills of practitioner and thereby improves the services provided to handicapped individuals, a primary professional concern. As certified evaluators need certification maintenance, it will be important that training resources

are ready to provide quality training which meets CCWAVES maintenance requirements as well as professional evaluator needs.

In 1981, the Stout Research and Training Center training programs, recognizing the need for advanced training, surveyed past participants to determine advanced training needs. Topics suggested were consistent with those being dealt with in the 1984 Issues Forum. Some of these were: validity, reliability and norming of work samples; use of vocational evaluation tools with severely disabled; assessment of learning styles; rehabilitation technology; program evaluation; private sector rehabilitation; and communications skills. Although many topics were initially offered in a single program, it was determined that most topics needed to be offered in more depth in separate, free-standing seminars. One of these "advanced" programs is the "Assessment and Placement of Industrially Injured" program previously mentioned.

All of these considerations point up the critical need for training at an advanced level for professional evaluators. As the field grows and changes, issues such as those discussed in this paper and at this conference need to be addressed through high level, advanced training seminars utilizing experienced professionals who are actively involved in the profession. As the field becomes more complex and sophisticated, training personnel must work more and more to identify experts in our field who are willing and able to share their expertise with their colleagues. To this end, the Stout RTC has developed a roster of adjunct faculty who are either field practitioners or faculty from other academic settings. These adjunct persons are utilized according to their expertise, availability, and seminar location and have helped immensely in the development of our advanced training programs, as well as to supplement our staff for fundamentals programs.

Another issue of professionalism is in the area of research. At present thirty Research and Training Centers are funded by NIHR, four with a vocational emphasis. Leaders in the rehabilitation field have recognized the need to carry out research and to disseminate results to the practitioners. However, results of research take a long time to reach practitioners and it is often in a form unintelligible to the everyday practitioner (and sometime to the everyday trainer!). Baker (1980) pointed out that "professions are developed over time by the shared knowledge of people engaged in a common area of interest and inquiry" and that "the application of knowledge (facts gained via the scientific process) is practiced more by professionals than technicians/craftsman." Baker identified a concern that is at the core of the issue of professionalism, and he went on to suggest that perhaps it is time to "expand our professional side through the development of theory related to the vocational development and adjustment of disabled persons."

Training personnel have a responsibility to reinforce this goal for our profession by including in our training programs relevant and timely research, by assisting to identify research issues through contact with practitioners, and by encouraging applied research by practitioners.

In conclusion, I have attempted to identify and discuss some of the issues in training of vocational assessment personnel. Certainly there are many more issues which could be discussed in all of the areas mentioned. The areas with which I have dealt reflect concerns expressed to the training staff of the Stout Research and Training Center by our program participants, by our National Advisory Council, and by other professional colleagues. The growth and development of our profession provides training personnel with complex challenges and opportunities. It is important for us not only to

be aware of the issues and changes in our field, but to communicate closely with other training programs to meet those challenges most effectively. I appreciate the opportunity to be involved in the National Forum on Issues in Vocational Assessment and hope that this paper will facilitate dialogue with others who are concerned with training issues in vocational assessment.

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#### Author

Colleen Fox Esser  
Senior Training Specialist  
Research and Training Center  
Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
Menomonie, Wisconsin 54751